·PIERRE·SALES·

THE PRICE OF A CORONET

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THE PRICE OF A CORONET

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1. A Christian Woman.
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   Adapted by Mrs. Benj. Lewis.

THE

PRICE OF A CORONET

OR

JEANNE BERTHOUT

COUNTESS DE MERCOEUR

ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH OF

PIERRE SALES

BY

MRS. BENJAMIN LEWIS

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THE MERSHON COMPANY PRESS,
RAHWAY, N. J.

TO MY HUSBAND:

FELICES TER ET AMPLIUS
QUOS IRRUPTA TENET COPULA NEC MALIS
DIVULSUS QUERIMONIIS.
SUPREMA CITIUS SOLVET AMOR DIE.

—*Horace.*

THE PRICE OF A CORONET.

I.

"RUINED! ruined!"

These were the first words that fell from the lips of Raoul Pontais, Count of Mercoeur, one bright June morning.

At the sound of his voice, Joseph, his valet, softly entered the room bringing the mail and daily papers.

"Did you call me, sir?"

"No! I will ring when I want you."

Raoul, thoroughly awakened, mechanically rolling a cigarette, thought of Gascony! Gascony, where he was born, and where the happiest hours of his life had been spent. Joseph's "trainent" Southern accent had recalled these memories. Gascony, the home of his fathers, whose ruined, though still habitable, chateau was there situated betwixt the road and the river. In his fancy, while seated on the edge of his bed this bright summer morning, he could recall the vine-clad slope, and the avenue of tall

poplars, his mother's favorite walk, and where he as a boy first learned to ride on a small Shetland pony. Through the past ten years, even now, the sound of the peasant's voice coming home from the harvest field seemed near him, he imagined, as though he could hear them say, "Make way for the young count." These thoughts almost distracted him, and as though anxious to banish the word "Ruined," he muttered "Mercoeur sur Baise." Mercoeur is situated near Livone, whose fertile fields are the pride of Gascony. The old ruined banqueting hall which was built even before the time of the wars of Henry IV, who after the peace of Nervain exclaimed to an ancestor of Raoul's, "Ventre-saint-gris! I want to shake the hand of such a redoubtable adversary." To-day owls and bats flew in and out of the halls and unhinged doors, where kings had dined.

Raoul was at Mercoeur finishing his studies when the tocsin of the Franco-Prussian war sounded, and only after much persuasion was he allowed to accompany his father. He was the last of his race.

A few months later, his mother, receiving no tidings of her dear ones, went to meet the army of the Loire; searching all the hospitals and ambulances for her husband and son, she found her son

dangerously wounded and delirious, the sole survivor of his family; his father had fallen at the battle of Patay.

The grief-stricken wife and sorrowing mother nursed her son tenderly during those awful days, obliged to live in a hovel with scarce food enough, much less medicines, and needful assistance; the privations she endured caused her to contract malarial fever, from which she never recovered. Two years later Raoul was an orphan.

Alone in the world at twenty-two, and master of a large fortune, the dullness of the chateau began to pall on him; shooting, going to church, and solemn dinners were all very well, but youth requires more gayety. One fine day he informed his aunt, the Countess de Lensac, that he was going to Paris, and to see the world; so he gave a farewell dinner to college chums; and to his aunt's disgust to Paris he went.

Paris! the modern Babylon! in whose gilded chains many a Southern gentleman has been enslaved. Joseph, his foster brother, accompanied him. Raoul's fortune was principally in real estate, the rents of which would have permitted him to live luxuriously, had he been content with one establishment; but it was certainly not enough for

two. During the first year of his residence in Paris the returns from his vintage were less than usual, so he ordered his lawyer to sell the property at Courdette. His aunt, when she heard of the sale, wrote him an indignant letter of four pages, finishing with this postscript, "Perhaps you remember the proverb here, 'those that sell a field, finish by selling their homes.'"

"What nonsense! the prophecies of an old woman!" cried Raoul, throwing her letter in the fire; and he was so angry that he would not write to congratulate her on the New Year.

But the old lady was right. She foretold truly the future; after Courdette, then the fields of Bounés, next the vineyards of Loustel, and in a little while all the outlying property and farms of Mercoeur went under the hammer. Sometimes the old peasants, after their work was over, would discuss the young count and his follies. "What a spendthrift! In five years he will not have a penny!" Only the young people in Livone cared to talk about Raoul and his exploits and bravery during the war. Nothing pleased them more than to see his name in the paper as a great society leader of the *jeunesse dorée* of Paris. They dared not express their opinions aloud in the presence of their

parents, still they thought he must be happy. Why, he had even caused a great social scandal, and when he came to Livone, he was not even proud, or cared to discuss it.

Even though he sold his property, he was having a royal good time ; they wished they could do likewise. Besides, he could always get a rich wife. What woman could refuse the Count of Mercoeur ? Had not Saint Baise got himself a rich wife ? The wiseacres shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads, saying, " He will sell all he has, even the chateau." " No ! no ! not the chateau ! " the young Livonaise would say when they heard their elders talking. " Nobody in Gascony sells his homestead, his birthplace."

One fine morning notices were posted announcing the sale of Mercoeur, the park and gardens. The news almost caused a revolution in Livone. The old folks were triumphant, the young hung their heads. In selling Mercoeur, Raoul evidently was at the end of his resources. He must have spent his money fast to have gone through three hundred thousand francs in ten years. Ill news travels apace. Marietta, his aunt's cook, heard it in the market place, and hurried home to tell her mistress.

" What ! What on earth are you saying, Mari-

etta?" she exclaimed. "Mercoeur advertised for sale? You go right back to the market place, and tell all your gossiping friends that it is false, false, do you hear? Some malicious falsehood, gotten up by an enemy of the count to ruin him. I myself will go and see his lawyer."

After dark that evening the Countess de Lensac, heavily cloaked and veiled, went on foot and alone to see Maître Lousseteau, Raoul's notary.

"Is it true that you have received orders to sell Mercoeur?" she inquired.

"A positive order, Mademoiselle," replied the notary.

"What are the park and grounds worth? I can guess pretty much the value of the chateau!"

"About seventy-five thousand francs; property has depreciated very much lately, and—you know no one has lived in the chateau for the past ten years."

"Very well, Maître Lousseteau. You will mortgage my vineyards at Ponsans, they are worth ten thousand francs, then there are the farms at Montesprou. You had better sell them outright for thirty thousand francs, I know a purchaser. If you send to my house in the morning I will give the money to make up eighty thousand francs which

you will remit at once to my nephew, and tell him at the same time that a foreigner has bought the chateau for cash. Do you understand distinctly what I tell you, as he must never know that I bought it? Never! Nor must anyone at Livone know it, not even your wife; and if you are asked who owns the chateau, say the Count of Mercoeur, of course!"

That evening, several of the countess's friends came in to play piquet. The dowager Countess de Lontras, seeing how nervous she was, inquired:

"Have you heard the news in the town about a sale?"

"What sale?"

"Mercoeur."

"So you have heard that gossip, have you? I never knew such a woman as you for listening to idle talk. I don't like to say it, but certainly you must be very gullible, to think that my nephew would sell his birthplace. I grant you he is a spendthrift, but still my sister's son is a gentleman, and incapable of selling the house where his mother died. Incapable! yes, it is preposterous to think of it!"

Poor old Aunt Lensac, "Aunt Economy," as she was called in her family, what tears would have

coursed down her wrinkled cheeks if she could have heard her nephew's voice when he opened the letter inclosing the draft.

"*Comment?* Is there any foreigner foolish enough to pay eighty thousand francs for that old barrack of a chateau?"

Joseph, when he heard of the sale, took it more seriously to heart. He had never forgotten his birthplace, and often wished he was back working in the harvest field. The splendor of his master's life in Paris ill accorded with the thrifty way in which he had been brought up. He struggled for a few moments to control his emotion, but could not. Tearfully he asked his master if it was true. "The other property I did not mind, but Mercoeur, it breaks my heart to think of it."

Raoul had recovered his usual gayety, with the eighty thousand francs in hand, and shrugging his shoulders, said, "Yes."

Another year of pleasure was before him. Eighty thousand francs would last him a year. This year lasted only six months, and the last franc sent by Maître Lousseteau had been spent with the same careless *bonhomie* as if there were ten thousand more at the back of it. For the last ten months they had been living on credit, and the only ready

money that he had, had been procured by the sale of his bric-a-brac and silver. Lately he had to sell his mare, Fille d'or; she had won him fifty thousand francs at Auteuil one sunny day. Sunny days always brought him good luck.

"When it rains I have the blues," he said to himself.

Still seated on the bed, he thought of the fifty thousand francs he had once spent in six weeks, assisted by a few friends. "I did fling money away," he muttered.

But he never gave a thought that he had almost flung his life away. He rang the bell for Joseph, and when he came in said :

"Put the jewel case away, Joseph." These were the last valuables he had in his possession, his mother's jewels, and a valuable ring, that she had placed on his finger the day he went to the war. "I cannot sell that," he said, "I would rather cut my throat."

Joseph was mournfully brushing his clothes; once in a while he would open his mouth as if he wanted to speak to his master, but it hurt him to have to say the tradespeople refused him any longer credit. That morning even the washerwoman had asked for her money. Raoul loved his valet, and

when he spoke of him he would say, "He is not a servant, he is the last of my family retainers, he serves me as I serve my country."

Joseph had taken complete charge of his domestic affairs since he had been in Paris, and managed it as well as the best of housekeepers. He was proud of his master and desirous that the service should be absolutely faultless. Knowing his employer's private transactions better than most servants, he could get rid of an importunate creditor or a troublesome mistress with more cleverness than Raoul himself, and was amply recompensed if his master would only speak a few words in *patois* while he was dressing.

"Excuse me, sir, but I am sorry to say the concierge says he won't wait any longer for the rent, which was due in April, and which no doubt you have forgotten to pay." Joseph, in spite of the many difficulties that surrounded him, could always invent some story to excuse his master, and for the last two months had kept the concierge quiet—an unheard-of feat, in Paris.

"You say he will not wait any longer?" asked Raoul indifferently, as he began to break the seal of a letter, "Why, here is a letter from de Bressac! I wonder what he has got to say! Oh! yes, he

wants me to lunch with a charming baroness—delighted, I am sure, Joseph! Get out my gray suit of clothes, be quick about it. What is the time?"

Joseph went to look at the clock.

"Half-past ten, sir."

"Trains leave every hour, so I can easily be at Bellevue by noon."

Joseph laid out the clothes asked for carefully on the chair, wishing he might find courage to ask his master for the money to pay the laundress. Raoul in going out said, "I shall be late coming home, Joseph. You can spend the day any way you like."

Any way he liked. That meant to say, as if he liked closing the door to importunate creditors, perhaps a sheriff's officer who would come to place his master's effects on the sidewalk of the respectable Rue St. Dominique.

Poor Joseph, he was very sad. Why was his master so anxious to go to this baroness—Baroness Gaetana de San Rinazzi? "I wonder if she is a lady, this baroness," thought the faithful fellow.

However, she is received in all good society, takes part in all social events, parties, balls, even funerals and weddings, is often an honored guest; petted by duchesses, and called "chère belle" as

one of the family. Nevertheless, Joseph did not think she was what she pretended to be. One who is assured of her social position, is not quite so anxious to stand well with every one.

And de Bressac, Jean Marie Bressac, who was always with her. Joseph knew who he was, for he came from the same village, but still there was excuse for de Bressac, he was an old playfellow of his master's. But the baroness,—"she is as much a baroness as I am," he muttered to himself, while making his master's bed, and gave an angry shake to the pillow as if to emphasize his remark.

II.

Raoul de Mercoeur was walking up the long avenue of oak trees, part of the old property of Madame de Pompadour. He stopped before an iron gate, on the other side of which he could hear merry laughter. He murmured, "San Rinazzi? Her name is not recorded in the Almanac de Gotha. Well, let it go! We are now a Republic."

While he was ringing the bell, which was partly hidden by the foliage, he turned his head, and saw two ladies passing, arm-in-arm. One was a tall, fair girl in deep mourning, the other, an old lady, perhaps her mother. "What a beautiful girl," he thought.

The old lady looked at the visitor curiously, but the young girl appeared absolutely unconscious. He watched, and saw them enter the next villa.

"Glad to see you!" he heard. He was dazed at de Bressac's voice, who turned toward a lady as he spoke. "Dear Madame, allow me to present you my old friend, the Count of Mercoeur."

No one in Paris knew exactly who de Bressac

was, still everybody knew him, and he went everywhere. Always dressed in latest fashion, tall, thin, and very bony, with a long mustache, a soft, gentle voice, better manners than the sons of the oldest families, decided in his opinions, kept his own council as to how he lived and who he was. Lived at the rate of a hundred thousand francs a year, thought to be very rich, but no one knew where his property was situated, though his accent was southern.

Very agreeable, always willing to help the ladies in organizing fairs, and other charitable works, never failed to witness the first night of a new play, would ride his friend's horses at steeple chases, (only as an amateur, be it understood), and never refused a friend a loan of ten louis.

Once the Duchess of Roquemont said, "I don't like his eyes; they are that bluish green, changing with the weather, and restless as though he was afraid to look you in the face."

For a long time he had been recognized as the most intimate acquaintance of the baroness. A few indiscreet persons whispered, "lover." It was still rumored that little Saint-Elme, having said something derogatory of her character, de Bressac promptly rewarded his audacity with a sword thrust.

In spite of this public denial, a few uninterested persons shrugged their shoulders.

Bressac was of a selfish, cold, calculating disposition, hardly likely to fall in love with a woman so much older than he was. And if he had fought on her account, why it only showed his gallantry, that's all there is to it. The conduct of Madame de San Rinazzi was far too circumspect to allow people to imagine that there was a lover. She was a widow, since she had appeared on the horizon of Parisian society. No one had seen the baron, but a magnificent oil painting graced the salon. There were rather too many decorations and orders on his breast, he must have been a very brave man, this colonel in the Italian army. Her daughter, for she acknowledged she had a daughter, a girl of fourteen, was being carefully educated by the Urselines, where only the daughters of the old noblesse could gain admittance. Her mother found the education was far too worldly at the Sacred Heart, and by a special favor had obtained her daughter admission at the Urselines. She herself had resided there during the first two years of her widowhood.

The baroness lived in the Rue Verneuil, where occasionally her footman announced the most dis-

tinguished names in France. In her salon the furniture was somber and rich, all gobelin tapestry and carved oak. A photograph of the Count de Chambord, with his own autograph, in a very rich frame, had the place of honor opposite that of her husband's picture; and over the mantle-piece a life-sized portrait of the murdered Bishop of Paris inspired respect of the devout.

When the baroness came from Italy to watch her daughter's education, with true maternal solicitude, she had been introduced to society under the auspices of the Duchess de Roquemont. Dame Rumor said that the baroness had assisted the ruined duke in marrying the daughter of Midas, the millionaire petroleum broker. This calumny fell to the ground, and Madame de San Rinazzi's five o'clock teas were a great success. She always had a bevy of beautiful girls, and naturally the young men were anxious to secure invitations. She was extremely particular whom she invited. Bressac had met the baroness at a charity fair; such a sympathetic person, she was warm-hearted and charitable, participating in all the good works, even to sending blankets to the Hottentots, etc., etc. During the summer the baroness, whose modest fortune would not permit her to spend the summer

in the whirl of some gay watering place, took a small cottage at Bellevue, "Which my modest means permit me to do," she said. Though she acknowledged her daughter was a miss of fourteen, her figure was still graceful, always well-dressed, and she had a magnificent pair of black eyes. Her hands were slender and well kept, perhaps too well kept, if anything.

Mercoeur examined her critically, and thought Bressac had nothing to complain of. "You are welcome at my house, Monsieur de Mercoeur," said the baroness smilingly, "I have asked Monsieur de Bressac to bring you often."

Mercoeur was one of the few who had been refractory in accepting the baroness's invitations to the five o'clock teas.

Raoul had an innate horror of pretensions; he would be friendly with a carter or a gardener, but the nobility of the third Republic disgusted him, and he felt confident that the baroness's title only dated back to the time she opened her salon on the Rue Verneuil.

Actuated solely by necessity he came to this woman's house, and strove to crush the rising antipathy he felt toward her. He came to her as a last resource from a hint given by de Bressac, "A most

obliging woman, 'mon cher,' perhaps she can suggest some way to mend your fortune."

Mend the fortune of a ruined gentleman ; a gentleman, whose name could be found in all histories ; these words had enlightened Raoul somewhat. During the last few years he had seen a good many of his friends make their fortunes through a wedding ring. Roquemont was one of the first ; he blamed them severely for bartering their name and title, as though it was a piece of furniture.

Raoul smiled at the baroness's warm welcome, and begged her to excuse his tardiness. De Bressac looked charmed. After a few minutes' laughing conversation Madame de San Rinazzi turned toward de Bressac and said, "You are so much at home here, won't you order lunch?" A real country lunch. The ladies in gay toilettes, the men in summer clothes. The table was spread under a rose arbor, whose fragrant leaves fell on the cloth ; the introductions were very unceremonious.

"Don't you know the Count de Mercoeur, the Marquis of St Leon, Captain Lira, the Viscount Poulans, Madame de Leuns, and others."

Very fine society, an avalanche of titles, many of which had a false ring, though a few were genuine. De Bressac was the only untitled person

in the gay throng. It would have amused Raoul on any other occasion to see how cleverly the baroness placed her guests, kept the conversational ball rolling, laughing at the jokes of Captain Lira and saying, "Oh, Duchess, Duchess, how could you laugh at the simplicity of our service in church this morning," where they had all attended.

Madame de San Rinazzi had given the place of honor on her right hand to Raoul. He felt she wanted to captivate him; she was certainly a fascinating woman, so innocent and gentle, and her style was thoroughly Parisian, and the way she had of hesitating in the middle of a phrase, permitted him to see her small white teeth. The Duchess of Roquemont interrupted their conversation several times by saying, "You quite monopolize the Count de Mercoeur's society."

The Duchess of Roquemont had never been able to resist the temptation of giving a person's title in full. Gaetana de San Rinazzi was cleverer than that; Raoul had not been able to trace the slightest vulgarity in either her speech or actions, she was perfectly educated, and her manners had that high state of polish that only comes from associating with thoroughbred people. She was saying when interrupted, "I am extremely sorry you never

graced any of our reunions." Raoul was almost as sorry as she pretended to be, and wished that he had allowed Bressac to introduce her to him before. He began to think it looked strange to eat a meal at a person's house at the first invitation, without ever having paid the formal call.

The luncheon was over, and where laughter had been heard now it was all silent. The guests had left the table, invited by Bressac, to visit the beautiful gardens which surrounded the villa. Gaetana asked the count to come into the house.

The drawing-room at Bellevue was far more simple in its furnishings than that of Rue de Verneuil; books, draperies, and statuettes helped to furnish this bijou room, the pictures of the king and the bishop had the same prominent positions, also one of his Holiness graced the wall. After the glare of the sun outside, the almost mysterious light was charming, and a heavy exotic perfume permeated the atmosphere.

"Is not this a charming room," asked the baroness, "for a tête-à-tête?"

"Oh! I think your residence is delightful," said Raoul, as he took her hand and kissed it most respectfully. And as she handed him a glass of Armagnac, she said, "This comes from Gascony,

you ought to relish it." At her earnest solicitation Raoul drank a second glass very slowly, curious to hear what she would say next. At the same time, he could not help thinking his father's vineyards might have furnished the grapes. Then he laughed to himself, and smilingly said to her, "I have lost my vineyards and those of my parents in your charming Paris, Madame."

Gaetana's face was a study, she looked so sympathetic, "Was it really true that Raoul Pontais, Count of Mercoeur, had sold all his patrimony, and strangers lived in his chateau?" "No, no! Mercoeur is still uninhabited, it was two years ago since I sold it, and my agent remitted me the money; he sold the entire property to a foreigner, I believe, who, strange to say, never showed up."

As if she was really sorry for him, she murmured, "Ruined! ruined! ruined!" Why the d——l had he told this woman he was ruined, but he had come to her for advice; did not Bressac say she might help him out?

Gaetana had changed her seat, and had placed herself by his side, striving to refill his glass. Raoul looked at her large dark eyes, and wondered how she could help him. There was a very embarrassing silence for a few minutes. Then Raoul

gained courage and told her his financial position, how he had squandered his capital, the dunning of his creditors; in fact, he was ready to cut his throat. The baroness hesitated a minute before answering Raoul's last words; she looked pensive, and finally said, "When a person has your name and title, it is very easy to get over money difficulties." Raoul jumped as though he had been shot, his teeth chattered. Had he then fallen so low that they dared to offer him money for bartering his name?

"Really, Madame ——"

She came a little closer to him and spoke so softly in her voluptuous voice, "Why was he vexed with a friend who wished to be of service to him? Yes, of service! It might have astonished Monsieur de Mercoeur, but Bressac, his old college chum, had told her his difficulties, and she thought——"

Mercoeur at once saw her business, he understood the five o'clock tea, and the number of people who had been invited. During the ten years he had resided in Paris, he had thrown into the fire a great many matrimonial agency cards. Still he could not understand how a woman, received in the best society of the Faubourg St. Germain, could

carry on such a "*métier.*" He felt inclined to turn on his heel and quit the presence of the Baroness de San Rinazzi, and to go right home and order Joseph never to admit Bressac,—Bressac, this society man, who was no doubt but a middle man in the employ of the baroness.

By this time he did not feel inclined to move, what with the perfume of the apartment, and the strength of the liquor, he yielded at the request of the baroness to talk it over. He was ashamed of himself, and listened attentively to the projects offered by this marriage agent.

"*Voyons*, you are ruined, completely ruined. Your only chance is to marry a rich woman. Now perhaps I can find you a rich girl, who is anxious to wear a coronet. Countess, that looks remarkably well on one's linen, a coronet with nine points is the prettiest of all." The first feelings of pride had left Raoul. After all he was the last of his race, no one had a right to ask him to account for his conduct. He certainly could not consider in the light of a family the few antiquities that remained in Gascony. There was only his Aunt de Lansac to whom he owed any family recognition, and since he had quarreled with her, all her property was to go to the hospital at Livone. She

was a very devout woman he heard, never missed early mass, and attired herself as near like a nun as she could. *Pouah!* He hated the country, with its prejudices and narrow mindedness, he would never go back. Never!

Besides, the woman he married would never know that he bartered his title for her gold. The marriage accomplished, the commission paid, he would forever close his doors to Gaetana and Bressac, "Why, he would be generous and pay them a large commission."

"Well, Madame, I accept your proposition; find me a rich wife and I shall be very grateful and pay you handsomely."

"*Helas!* Monsieur, my modest fortune obliges me to receive some pecuniary recompense, were it otherwise I never would desire any payment."

Then she began to talk of a charming young girl, well educated, extremely pretty, living with her widowed mother. "It's really the mother who requested me to try and find a husband for the young lady."

"Have you been acquainted with them a long time?"

"Only since the death of the father, who was a large manufacturer; the girl is fair and tall."

"Ah! neighbors; perhaps I met them this morning."

"Really; have you already met them? What a curious thing chance is. Doubtless they were coming from mass." The baroness pretended to be perfectly astonished.

"Well! You see the girl is pretty enough for a prince, and such a magnificent fortune, more than a million. Half of it is hers to do as she pleases with on her wedding day. The mother's health is poor. You will be a millionaire before long, Monsieur."

"Are you quite sure her dowry is over five hundred thousand?"

"Yes! Why?"

"Because it is not the amount that interests me individually, only I suppose out of my future wife's dowry I will have to pay your commission."

"Oh, no; do not let that bother you. Just give us your note for three hundred thousand, which we are obliged to charge as commission. The rest of the fortune belongs to you." Seeing that Raoul shuddered, she hastened to say, "You need not pay us in a lump sum; little by little, we would not inconvenience you for the world." At that moment the sound of a piano was heard.

"Your future bride, mon cher, she is a remarkably fine musician."

The young girl was playing one of Schubert's Nocturnes. Raoul remembered the piece, his mother used to play it at Mercoeur Sur Baise, when he was a child.

"No! No! No!" he cried. "A marriage arranged like this is infamous!"

The baroness replied:

"You would prefer, perhaps, being arrested for debt. In eight days you would beg of me to find you a wife. It will be too late then. The Count of Mercoeur, arrested for debt and a bankrupt, never could hope to marry Jeanne Berthout, the daughter and heiress of a respectable manufacturer."

Raoul was silenced. Gaetana arose and walked over to her desk for a pen and sheet of stamped paper.

"Now, Monsieur, let us finish this trivial affair, write what I tell you; you will be grateful to me some day."

"*I, the undersigned, Raoul Pontais, Count of Mercoeur, promise on my honor, to give to the Baroness San Ranazzi, the sum of three hundred thousand francs out of the dowry of Mademoiselle Jeanne Berthout, if in one year from now, this lady becomes*

my wife through the mediation of Madame San Ranazzi."

"That is all right, now sign it and put your address, 54 Rue St. Dominique. It is always better to do things in a business-like way, we are only mortals."

"But as this is a business affair, what guarantee have you that I should pay the above note? Individually I have not a cent."

"Your word as a gentleman is sufficient, my dear sir."

. . . . . .

"What a magnificent day, the end of spring," cried Bressac, as he opened the door of the salon; behind him came the guests, laughing, with their arms full of flowers.

Raoul had written with a very trembling hand, and as he cast his eager eyes on the paper held by madame, who carefully read it, smiling as she saw the glance he gave on his dishonored signature, she took good care to lock it up in her steel escritoire.

"How unkind of you to have left us alone," said the Duchess of Roquemont to the baroness.

"I had a bad headache."

"Oh, yes, and as a nurse I suppose you selected the Count de Mercoeur; allow me to congratulate you, sir!"

Raoul felt feverish and wretched, and paid no attention to the duchess, nor did he return Bressac's hand shake; he was in a hurry to leave, to quit the society where everything was assumed, and he himself was obliged to be. He invented an invitation to dine in Paris.

"What, are you going so soon to leave us?"

"I am obliged, Madame, unfortunately."

"Now you know the way to the house I hope you won't forget us. I spend the entire summer here," and she bowed her adieus in a most dignified way.

Raoul hurried to the railroad station, trying hard to repress the word, "canaille," which escaped from his lips.

It was in the hands of this "canaille," that he placed his reputation, "Pardieu." He guessed why the Roquemonts were always at her house, evidently the duke had not paid all the commissions due yet. And Bressac, what rôle was he playing? Was he an unconscious intermediary, or paid employee? Bressac was not unconscious! With his cleverness and sagacity, no. He must profit by these nefarious negotiations, perhaps a partner of Gaetana's, he noticed she often said "We."

"This man whom I called my friend, a college chum, is he only a scoundrel, a blackleg? But

am I myself any better than Bressac? What evil genius has taken hold of me this morning!"

When he reached his chambers, Joseph had bad news for him. They were going to summon him through the sheriff, on the following day, for non-payment of rent.

"No, after all, Bressac had acted the good friend; this marriage will be my salvation," and the names of many of his friends came into his mind, who had been married in the same way. Roquemont, Lastignac, Montbrun, Marsies, and many others, whose names and families were as good as his own.

"*Pardieu!*" The old instincts were not dead within him yet; he remembered his parents, so straightforward, so upright; then Aunt Economy, whose strictness and honesty was proverbial in Gascony. His father's bravery and nobility came back to him as he remembered how he fell at Patay.

Joseph was saying, "I do not know what I can tell them, and when I think the sheriff's officer will be here to-morrow,—they are almost here now." Raoul straightened himself up and said harshly, "You go to the landlord, and as you do not know what else you can say to him, say this, 'I will

surely pay you before the end of the month, along with the rest of my creditors.'" It was a miserable evening for Raoul, and he dined alone.

At Bellevue, Bressac and Gaetana only exchanged a few words.

"How goes it?"

"He put on airs, but we have him fast in our toils."

III.

MADEMOISELLE JEANNE BERTHOUT was the only child of a rich manufacturer, lately deceased. Jeanne's father had, like many others, worked himself up, having been foreman in the works he owned when he died. He had married the daughter of the proprietor, and had the pleasure of seeing on his wedding day, "Jean Berthout and Company" on the letter heads and over the doors of the huge factory. An entirely commercial marriage, no love on either side to distinguish it from the usual bourgeoise marriage, where the chief foreman usually marries one of the daughters.

Love, love! he never thought of that, nor was it considered a necessary appendage to marriage. Where could he find time to make love. Plenty of orders, adding up bills and ordering workmen, and trying to prevent them from joining trades unions took up all his time.

He read his wife's disposition thoroughly in a month, and saw she was a good little Parisian, fond of bon-bons and dress, and spent her afternoons

shopping. Nothing pleased her better than a Sunday spent in the country. She selected Sunday for her reception day, as her husband's business friends and their wives could grace her salon on that day. When the child was born it almost caused a quarrel; the mother wanted to play with it as a doll, to her husband's disgust, and he determinedly declared that the child was a human being, and he would have her educated as such, and he had a paternal right to direct the manner in which she was to be brought up.

"You have your friends to entertain, shopping to do, balls and receptions to attend; you cannot take a child to all those places, even though she is dressed like an idol."

Madame Berthout did not object to giving up her daughter's education to her husband, and when she would speak of him to her friends it was to say:

"He is a good fellow; he makes an excellent nurse."

We will leave Madame Berthout to her acquaintances. Monsieur Berthout had ordered the nurse to take the child for an airing every day in front of the workshop, and would often leave his desk and office to snatch a kiss from her rosebud lips. One day, when his wife came in unexpectedly, she went

over to kiss Jeanne, saying, "My pet, I have not seen her since this morning." Her husband said, "Hush, she is asleep now ; wait till she wakes up." Nothing was allowed to disturb Jeanne's repose. Her father directed her life automatically, and it was on his knees she first learned her "A B C's." When she reached her teens, her father's study was the only place she learned her lessons, and often asked his assistance to solve some problem. Nothing delighted her more than to be able to coax him to leave his business for a few hours, and one day he asked her if she liked to go to an exhibition of machinery. She replied joyously, "Father, I am happy with you anywhere." Her mother declined to go (as she had to go to a reception of a friend), so Jeanne and her father went alone. He had taught her the use of all the machinery used in his business, pointed out which was the best workman, and she was as delighted as he when he bought a new machine. She was so proud on her fifteenth birthday to receive a steel jewel case, marked with gold letters :

"A present from her father's workmen, and made in his shop."

One day she came to the office where he was talking with his lawyer, who hesitated to speak

before the young lady. "Continue your conversation," Jean Berthout said, "my daughter is my partner."

This happy state of affairs was interrupted in consequence of a severe physical and mental strain. Jean Berthout contracted some heart trouble. Menaced by aneurism of one of the arteries, he felt death was close at hand; he had one last wish, which he worked with almost gigantic force to achieve. He trebled his business, so that Jeanne might be a millionaire.

Often she would beg of him to desist from his labors, and forcibly take him from his office, long after midnight.

The desired million was soon earned, which he invested in Government bonds; then there was the business, the factories, the house and furniture, all for Jeanne. Too late he consented to rest; his last effort broke the silver cord. He died suddenly in his foundry.

Jeanne was utterly prostrated; her tears never ceased to flow until the day of the funeral; her only consolation were the words "Father, father."

The pomp and ceremony disgusted her; the crowd at the church and cemetery dazed her; it

was raining, everything was wet and damp. The priests were in a hurry to get the body in the ground; the sympathies and caresses of friends fell on her ears with a far-off sound.

When she returned home, her mother immediately gave orders to the servants to open the shutters and clear all the funeral flowers out, light fires, and make the house look cheerful. To hear her mother talk this way was a terrible shock to Jeanne, and she ran to her own room crying. Her mother came after her, and said, in a peevish tone, "My child, I can't allow you to stay here in all your wet clothes until evening. Why, you will grieve yourself to death." She let her mother's maid take her bonnet and crape shawl without paying the slightest attention to them. Her grief completely prostrated her.

A few days afterward Madame Berthout brought a paper for her to sign.

"What is it for, mother?"

"I am going to sell the factory."

She never supposed her mother would sell the factory which her father's industry had built. "Why cannot we keep it? It is a part of my dowry." Her mother looked at the girl with astonishment.

"Are you crazy? Keep the factory? I suppose you would like to run it—you have your father's ideas. To keep the factory you would have to marry a mechanic. With your fortune you certainly ought to marry some one better than a workman."

"I will do what you like, mother; but the house!"

"The house and factory will all be sold together. I have made all necessary arrangements; the only thing required is your signature, on account of the peculiar way your father made his will."

"Very well, mother!"

After the house and factory had been sold Madame Berthout found herself in possession of fifteen hundred thousand francs in cash. She hastened to leave the Marais, this bourgeois neighborhood, and bought a magnificent house in the Faubourg St. Honoré.

Her mourning was the richest money could buy, one mass of crape; she wore it the regulation time. The only regret she had was, that her daughter had not been educated in a fashionable boarding school, but on that subject her husband had been inflexible. Jeanne had never been in a school in her life. Her father had been her sole instructor,

and she had no young friends or confidantes to whom she could open her heart.

Madame Berthout, intoxicated by the change in her social position, did nothing but talk of her money and the property she owned—her villa at Bellevue. At last she was mistress of her own house, and could dress her servants in black livery now. By and by it would be blue and gold, with her initials on their buttons!

Jeanne still lived in the memory of the past, never thinking of interrupting her mother in her present pastime of furnishing houses and buying carriages, though she certainly was shocked, three months after her father's death, for her mother to say to her, "Jeanne, I have decided to make Thursday my reception day. Sunday was good enough for the Marais! but here."

"Receive visitors so soon, mother?"

"God knows I loved your father, but sorrow is not everlasting, and it is not by shutting you up I shall ever find you a husband!"

"Me a husband? There is plenty of time!"

"No, there is not. You are twenty-one years old, and pretty, though I say it; and think what a dowry you have! I do not think there is another

girl in the Faubourg that has such a marriage portion as yours."

This was herm other's fond dream ; and Madame Berthout was anxious to have a titled son-in-law, so that she could say to her servants, in speaking of her daughter, " Madame la Comtesse," or " Madame la Marquise "; or, even better than that, she might talk to her friends at her Thursday receptions, " My son-in-law, the duke." Fancy the delight in ordering in the shops, where she used to trade, a trousseau for her daughter, with a coronet, and a carriage with amorial bearings on its panels.

Her daughter ought not to live as a bourgeoise ; it was quite enough that she had been obliged by her father to marry his foreman,—but her daughter, oh, no !

Two years rolled on this way, during which Jeanne seemed to feel a greater void in her existence ; timid confidences hesitated on her lips when she would speak to her mother, whose sole pleasure was going to balls and parties ; and when Jeanne would try to talk to her, all the mother would converse about was the Charity Fair of the Duchess Rochefoucauld or the ball of the Princess of Sagan. The newspapers were full of these things.

"By and by, my child, you will be an honored guest at these parties, and be called 'La Belle Marquise de——,' no, countess,—I like the name countess better, it seems more dignified."

Whether it was a prince or a baker, Jeanne began to think she would like a husband; a man whose intelligence she could rely upon, and whose character would be as upright as that of her father! a master whom she could admire and trust.

IV.

MADAME BERTHOUT met the Baroness Gaetana San Rinazzi at a fair which was given for the benefit of the poor. It was necessary for furthering of her profession that the baroness should be seen everywhere. She did not care what the charity was called, or in whose behalf it was; all she asked for was some plausible story to solicit from the benevolent.

She knew exactly how much sympathy to excite for the object of her solicitude, and accompanied her profuse thanks with a smile and some well-turned phrase, such as, "In the interests of the unfortunates I beg for, I thank you, and whose sufferings I knew would touch your kind heart." When about to leave she was often requested to prolong her charitable call into a social visit. Was she not the celebrated Madame San Rinazzi, whose five o'clock teas were the talk of the Faubourg, and whose name was mentioned in the fashionable journals as a paragon of virtue and charity? When asked if she was that lady, she would diffidently reply in the affirmative, "I am the person mentioned

so kindly in the papers, Madame, but my reunions are not fashionable; simply a few young girls who come to eat plum cake and gossip about 'chiffons,' but if you would honor me by your presence I should be flattered."

On her return home she would gleefully rub her hands and exclaim, "Another good day's work; seed planted for a great many more marriages." Her tact was simply marvelous, and all her business transactions were with gentlemen only; women, she would say, gossiped, and might give the character of her profession away. Men would be discreet for their own sakes; no man likes to think he sold himself. Bressac was her assistant, and he gained all the necessary information regarding the social status of the titled beggars whom she angled for. These kind of fish are plentiful in Paris.

When a fond mother would whisper to her confidentially at some social gathering, "I wish I could marry my Emelie or my Claretta," the baroness, desirous of pleasing her friend, would offer to introduce some gentleman, saying before she did, "Monsieur Le Comte X. Y. Z., or Monsieur le Marquis de Carribas is of a very old family, his title is genuine, and your sweet daughter has enough fortune for both."

By these means the baroness was an honored guest in many households, and could a gentleman refuse to invite a lady, who had been the means of finding him a charming wife and a good dowry, to his house; it would appear ungrateful.

Jeanne had been invited to accompany her mother to assist at an entertainment gotten up by the baroness on behalf of the Magdalenes, a charitable society.

She did not like the mysterious surroundings of the baroness, these whispered confidences and discussions, half religious and half worldly. "Mother, I do not like that woman," she said, when she returned home, "you ought not to have accepted her invitation."

"Well! you certainly have not a grain of common sense. You are exactly like your father; no manners—not like Madame San Rinazzi indeed, a delightful woman; she is received everywhere, and you meet the nicest people at her house. Only gentlemen, she would not encourage workmen as your father did."

It was just this that did shock Jeanne. There were too many gentlemen.

"Besides, my daughter, when you know her better you will think otherwise. We shall see a

great deal of her this summer, as our cottages adjoin."

It was at Bellevue where Jeanne met Bressac one morning very early. She liked to rise with the lark, and to breathe the fresh air before the sun was up. Bressac, the son of a peasant, had never given up his habit of early rising, and was often out at daybreak, and would sometimes walk out from Paris, reaching his friend's villa, even before the servants were up, and not to awaken them, he would continue his promenade.

He raised his hat to Jeanne, saying, "A lovely morning, Mademoiselle."

She had forgotten who he was, when he recalled himself to her memory as having had the honor of being introduced to her at the salon of Madame San Rinazzi. She curtly wished him "Good-morning."

Bressac turned round and looked after her. "She's clumsy, but she has a fine head of hair, and if only attired properly, why we might make her a countess."

At breakfast he said to Gaetana.

"I have found a husband for your neighbor."

"Of the old nobility?"

"Yes; his coronet is for sale?"

"Bring him here Sunday."

Mercoeur came and went away, and came again. A few Sundays after, in the miserable white-washed village church at Bellevue, Raoul found himself seated with the baroness, who, with several friends, would not have missed mass on Sunday; though in Paris they never rose till lunch time, but here in the country it was different, and it seemed to have a special charm for the baroness to gather some friends about her and fill the church. On this Sunday, when the clanging bell announced it was church time, the Duchess de Roquemont said:

"Well, we must go to the little church to-day."

While Mercoeur was looking at the gay toilettes of these Parisiennes, and the difference between them and the peasants, the priest commenced a sermon; not a real sermon, but a kind of gossip where he published the bans of marriage and announced the holy days of the ensuing week, and wound up with a few words from the Holy Father.

Then the priest asked for generous donations.

"Brethren, be generous, we need money to combat with the Evil One, let the collection be bountiful."

Two seats ahead of Raoul, he heard a discussion.

It was Jeanne saying to her mother, "I don't like to, mother, really I don't."

"My child, my child, I promised you should take up the collection." Madame Berthout almost forced her daughter to rise, and placed in her hands the large red velvet pouch with the gold handle. Jeanne looked up and saw in front of her a tall, dark young man, and heard Madame la Baronesse whisper, "My dear, the Count of Mercoeur will accompany you."

It was for this reason, then, that Gaetana had stopped on her way to church at their house, and looked over her toilette carefully, saying, "Jeanne, put a little powder on your face, you have too much color."

So this was the man that was destined for her.

Well! she was glad it was settled, as he appeared quite a nice young man, much better than many of the others that frequented the baroness's villa. Nice dark eyes, well-penciled brows, and dark mustache. He was walking by her side, she had to hold his hand, which trembled in hers. It was warm.

The Duchess de Roquemont laughed in the open pages of her breviary, and said in an undertone to her husband, "She is not bad looking, this

little bourgeoise." Jeanne was highly embarrassed as she felt all eyes were directed to her. The collection was good. When it was over they had to go into the sacristy ; it was a pleasant moment for both. The money was turned out on the table, the sound of prayers mingled curiously with the clink of the money,—they were afraid to speak to each other. Raoul was utterly astonished not to find any assumed modesty or shyness in this young girl. She had made the collection, subject to her mother's wish, and now she was waiting to hand the money, when it was counted, to the priest. Raoul said to her :

"Mademoiselle, I have not put anything in the collection ; will you allow me to offer my mite ?"

"You had better give it to the poor yourself, I think it is better."

"Do you disdain such a monotonous work as you have been engaged in ?"

"I do not like to mix money with religion, sir ?"

"The curé thought more of the political situation than the charitable one to my mind." Was it a lesson this young girl was trying to teach him, thought Raoul. No. She spoke very seriously ; a matter-of-fact statement, as if she believed it.

Raoul tried to place the curious impression this plebeian girl had made on him.

"Why did you take up the collection, Mademoiselle, if it was distasteful to you?"

"Sir, a young girl is not her own mistress. I obeyed my mother."

"Then, if your inclinations had been consulted you would have probably refused me for your escort."

"I did not say that."

During the silence that ensued, the notes of the organ could be heard, and Raoul took the opportunity of considering the appearance of this girl that he was to buy with three hundred thousand francs of her own money.

She was tall and fair, and, as Bressac had remarked, rather heavy limbed; she had reddish brown hair; bluish gray eyes, with heavy black lashes; honest, straightforward eyes, that looked you squarely in the face. Her very appearance indicated the strength of her character, and this gentleman, who was not lost to all sense of feeling, felt the delicacy of his situation.

Ruined, at the end of his resources, he must be obliged to sell his name and title. He had expected to find a flighty, insignificant girl, intoxi-

cated with the idea of her being a countess, and whose greatest pleasure would be shopping; but here was a girl who might fall in love with him, Raoul thought, but she certainly would not fall in love with his coronet.

Who, then, was the girl that had been bewitched by his rank?

Gaetana told him, "You are a count; that is worth a fortune to you."

Raoul said to Jeanne, "Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"No! there is only my mother and myself; my father died two years ago. He was my only friend." Raoul looked to see if there were any tears in her eyes, as he himself recalled the battle fields of Patay, and the sorrow it brought him.

Jeanne's face was sorrowful, but no sign of a tear, as she asked him, "Have you any family?"

"No; I am an orphan."

"That is a great misfortune; but when you loved those who are gone, very dearly, their memory is always vivid in your heart; in fact, you might imagine they are always with you, to counsel you in the difficult situations of life."

Raoul's face became pallid. "Your father was a great manufacturer, was he not?"

"My father had been my grandfather's foreman; after a while, when the business enlarged, he was taken into the firm; at my grandfather's death he became sole owner. Poor father, how hard he worked!"

"You must have loved him very dearly?"

"Indeed, I did," replied Jeanne; "he was my only guide and companion."

Jeanne began to talk to Raoul, who had discovered, unintentionally, the road to her heart, by talking to her of her father.

He began to guess the history of her life. Her deceased father was evidently an upright, truthful man (such are necessary to prevent the world being composed entirely of liars) and had brought up his daughter with a horror for everything which was not straightforward and honorable. His own father and mother had tried to instill these principles into him too—and was he going to forget all feelings of honor in deceiving this young girl? He despised the idiocy of the mother, who would rather give a title to her daughter with a *roué*, than the love and protection of an honest man.

For the first time he regretted all the follies of his life; the fortune he lost on the green table; and the hours that he wasted in the boudoir of

some courtesan. He felt humiliated at the retrospection. Why had not chance permitted him to meet Jeanne and honorably woo her, instead of meeting her through the intermediary of a brokeress?

He was furious when he thought of the note he had written eight days before. The want of money and his lack of it was like a nightmare. The promises he had made his creditors,—supposing he failed to keep his promises, they would expose him, and therefore he was obliged to continue the rôle he had commenced.

Mass was out; the baroness and her friends entered the sacristy; one of them said to Jeanne, "What, twenty-six francs! why, that is a superb collection for this poor church. Superb, M. le Curé. I don't suppose you ever had so much in one collection, did you?"

"No, ladies, and I thank the young lady who passed the alms basket; also the gentleman who aided her."

Madame Berthout was radiant; so proud to hear her daughter complimented by a duchess. Captain Lira offered his arm to the worthy woman; his rosetted buttonhole had quite captivated her.

Gaetana had so arranged the company that

Raoul and Jeanne walked together. Jeanne quite understood the program. Lunch was served at the baroness's villa on the terrace. Raoul and Jeanne found themselves seated side by side. They were rather embarrassed, feeling unable to continue the conversation begun in the sacristy before this gay throng, who were discussing the respective merits of two famous actresses.

After a while the talking ceased. The baroness suggested a promenade in the woods, and, turning toward Raoul, said, *sotto voce*, "Everything is working admirably. The mother thinks you are delightful,—offer her your arm, and your conquest will be achieved when the walk is finished."

Raoul did not reply, but when they reached the entrance to the woods Bressac saw him take his hat off and wish the party good-evening. He walked toward the count quickly.

"What does this mean, are you crazy?"

"Perhaps."

"Where are you going?"

"I intend returning to Paris."

"Without saying adieu to the party?"

"Yes."

"But you are invited to dinner."

"I can't stay."

"Have you a love affair on hand?"

"No; but I shall never come here again."

"Why not?"

"I am ashamed of myself. To save my life at the cost of reputation? Never!"

Bressac looked at his friend a moment quizzically. Then he burst out laughing, a harsh, dry laugh, very dramatic, but not original. You will find its counterpart in the third act of "Faust."

"*Felicité du ciel? ah, fuyons.*"

"I have to serve my *Mephistopheles*,—so must you."

He brought Raoul back triumphantly, despising him in his own heart for being so weak. Raoul joined Jeanne, and began talking about the beautiful weather. The sun was gilding the roof of the pavilion, and the singing of the birds could be heard in every direction.

Jeanne said to him, "I was very egotistical this morning, talking of myself and father. I never asked about your parents."

He told her his history and his childhood. He spoke of his beautiful country, and his father and mother. "And I had to sell their home, through my extravagance." Through innate delicacy of feeling he refrained from saying chateau.

"How old were you when you lost your father?"

"Twenty-two."

"During the war?"

"He fell at my side."

What made these two young people ask each other such personal questions, was it chance?

Behind them Captain Lira and the baroness were eulogizing the count to Madame Berthout.

"What a charming man the Count de Mercoeur is?"

"So intellectual."

"And one of the oldest families in France."

It was the Duchess of Roquemont who spoke of old families. She sprung from the gutter.

V.

THAT Sunday evening Madame Berthout said to her daughter, "You must surely see we were not entirely in place among all the titled guests at the baroness's to-day." Jeanne did not make any reply, but thought to herself, "What business had Raoul there, he was so superior to the rest. Why do I feel nervous when I speak to him? I am sure he never said one word about love to me." But she quite comprehended he was there to court her.

She could not be mistaken ; the collection at the church, he was there to help her ; then the baroness took care that they should be together all day. What a pity he was a nobleman ; she would have preferred a person of her own rank. In saying good-night to her mother, she was asked, "Do you like the young count? Is he agreeable to you?"

"Very, mother."

"Would you marry him?"

Jeanne blushed, and replied, "Not yet."

The following day Madame Berthout called on the baroness and thanked her. "My dear friend,

I am extremely indebted to you ; I do not know how to thank you."

"I am very glad I was able to be of some use to you," said the baroness, with a smile.

Two days afterward Raoul went to call on the baroness. She asked him to walk with her around the garden. She heard footsteps on the gravel walk of the adjoining house, and surmised that Jeanne was there ; poor Jeanne, who was walking up the path. The baroness called her. The young girl's head could be seen over the hedge. Gaetana began to talk with Madame Berthout, and invited her to come into the house, and left the young people to converse with each other over the fence. Jeanne and Raoul were very pleased to meet and feel they were alone, not watched by a crowd of friends, and without the presence of Bressac.

"Is Bressac your friend ?"

"A friend from my childhood, Mademoiselle. Why do you ask me ?"

Jeanne answered, "I don't like him. You may think me very peculiar but there is something in his eyes I distrust."

The antipathy Jeanne felt for Bressac, Raoul felt toward Gaetana.

Their conversation became very friendly, and the

count made up his mind to ask the baroness to return him his note.

Was it not a dishonorable thing, this marriage, wherein he had purchased the right to own the girl; and now he was in love with her? It was to be a love match after all.

Jeanne, in allowing this new affection to penetrate her heart, did not follow any suggestions except those made by her in her consciousness, and she thought if her father had been alive, he would have said, "You can love M. de Mercoeur, he is an honorable man."

The lack of affection she had felt for the past two years was now obliterated. There was one thing that astonished Jeanne,—it was the facility with which her mother threw the house open to the young count. "It looked, though, as if she wanted to throw me at his head; but I will not let her."

Frankly, Madame Berthout could not be prudent when she was realizing all her most ambitious hopes. She could not open her mouth without mentioning the count,—his family and ancestry. She might be the mother-in-law of a man who was descended from the warriors who fought at the battle of Crecy.

In spite of all indications and calculations, it was

a shock to her the day Raoul asked Jeanne in marriage, saying, "I love your daughter, Madame, and with your permission I will make her my wife."

Her daughter a countess! Countess of Mercoeur! She wished she could change her name into "Mother of a Countess!"

"The whole trousseau should have a coronet embroidered on each piece."

"Mother, that would be ridiculous!"

"Ridiculous, the coronet of a countess; that will never be ridiculous! My children, will you allow me to live with you?"

"We shall be delighted, Madame."

While the old lady was buying linen and lace, the lovers were talking of the future. Occasionally Raoul would think of the ignominious rôle he played, and hardly replied to Jeanne's questions. Sweetly she would say when noticing his silence:

"Are you thinking of your parents and wishing they were here to see your happiness?"

"Yes, Jeanne; yes."

"I am sorry I never knew them, but you must have some relatives left." "Will you take me to see them?"

"That is——" then he thought of Aunt de

Lansac and hesitated, "I am not on good terms with some of them!"

"You must be reconciled; our marriage must be pleasure, not sorrow."

One day while shopping in the Maison Blanc where Raoul had accompanied her, Jeanne picked up a card which laid on the counter. After reading it she tore it in half.

"What was that?" asked Mercoeur.

"The advertising card of a marriage agency, where broken down gentlemen could find wives." Raoul made her no answer, and she continued, "Don't you think it awful for a young girl to be married that way, like a lamb led to the slaughter, without being aware of it and the cupidity of man?"

"Yes, Jeanne; what makes you think of such dreadful things?" The word infamous he could not utter.

Raoul's creditors patiently consented to wait his convenience, as they had seen in one of the society papers the announcement of his approaching marriage.

Bressac was thoughtful enough to send the following society note:

"*In a month there will be a grand wedding at St.*

Philip's. M. Le Comte de Mercoeur, who is the last of his family, will wed Mademoiselle Jeanne Berthout, the daughter of the late millionaire, Jean Berthout, who was one of Paris' celebrated manufacturers. The future Countess of Mercoeur, we hear, is very charming as well as beautiful."

When Madame Berthout read this paragraph she fell into her daughter's arms, crying for joy, while the word "countess" seemed to ring in her ears.

VI.

THREE weeks before his marriage, Raoul, at the request of Jeanne, wrote Mademoiselle de Lansac a long letter, in which he asked her to forgive his neglect and foolishness, and at the same time announced his approaching marriage with a most charming and wealthy young woman.

The old lady showed the letter to her confidante, Vidame de Lontras, one evening during a game of piquet.

"What could I do at the marriage of Mademoiselle Berthout?"

The Vidame at first approved of the old lady's intention of staying away; the Countess de Lansac could not sign as a witness the marriage certificate of such a miserable mesalliance.

"Still, it was unkind to let Raoul be married without the presence of some friend or relative; besides you would be wretched here on his wedding day, my dear."

"I could have a mass said from the parish church."

"Bah! and have him married in the presence of strangers, without any kinsfolk to witness the tying of the nuptial knot."

"Let us continue our game, Vidame, you are too sympathetic."

That night the Countess de Lansac could not sleep very well, thinking that her only sister's son would be married without her presence or her blessing.

She arose early, in order that her maid might pack her best dresses, and sent word to her two nephews, Gaston de Combat and Louis de Lansac. When they answered her summons, she said:

"My dear boys, we will all go to our cousin Raoul's wedding as he requests us. Get your trunks packed to-day, as I wish to start before I change my mind."

Aunt Economy was met at the Orleans station by Raoul's *fiancée*. Before kissing the girl she critically examined her appearance, astonished to see such a wealthy young woman so plainly dressed in black. The readiness with which Jeanne relieved her of all her parcels delighted her. She was also very favorably impressed with the modest way Jeanne addressed her, saying:

"*Bonjour, Madame!*"

She took Jeanne's hands and kissed her on both cheeks, saying, "Kiss me, little one, and call me aunt, as Raoul does."

In the carriage, while driving to the house, the two young men were evidently afraid to talk, so the old lady confined her conversation to Jeanne alone, who apologized for her mother's absence.

"You will pardon my mother in not coming to meet you at the depot, but she had to stay at home to receive some friends."

"That's all right, dear, I only want to meet you. Are you very fond of that scamp of a nephew of mine?"

Jeanne, without blushing, replied, "Yes, very fond of him!"

(These two women were drawn toward each other, and felt instinctively that they would be friends.)

Mademoiselle de Lansac was shocked on her arrival at the house to see Madame Berthout's brilliant costume. She had expected to find her in deep mourning, as her daughter was in black. Jeanne saw at once that her mother had not made a favorable impression on the old lady, so she hastened to offer to escort her to her room:

"I must show you your room, Aunt. Raoul will show you yours, gentlemen. Unfortunately, his

bachelor's apartments were so small that he could not accommodate you, so we were pleased to have you as our guests. We will go upstairs now."

"By and by, my dear," said Aunt de Lansac, "you must take me all over the house."

Raoul himself conducted his cousins to their room. When they were alone Gaston said, "What a nice girl your *fiancée* is. Let me congratulate you."

The old lady was most anxious to see the house, and only took her bonnet and cashmere off when she announced herself as ready to make a pilgrimage through the many apartments. She was delighted at the homelike comfort displayed; at the same time, the artistic furnishing and the linen room quite captivated her. She turned to Jeanne, "You cannot be a real Parisienne!"

Jeanne smiled.

"A real Parisienne, born and brought up in Paris—in Marais."

In Jeanne's own room was a large oil painting by Jules Breton, "The Gleaners"; opposite it was a portrait of a gentleman. Mademoiselle de Lansac noticed it immediately and said, "Your father. You resemble him a good deal. Tell me, how did you meet my nephew?"

"Madame San Rinazzi introduced him to us."

Mademoiselle de Lansac tapped her forehead, trying to recall the armorial bearings of the family of San Rinazzi, when the sound of gay voices could be heard in the adjoining room. "There's Madame San Rinazzi now!" exclaimed Jeanne. Madame Berthout opened the communicating doors.

"Allow me, Mademoiselle, to introduce you to my dear friend, the Baroness San Rinazzi."

Aunt Economy acknowledged the baroness's courtesy with a nod of the head. She did not like this baroness; not her style at all. What was Bressac, who was the son of one of her tenants, doing here? She said to him, "You here? good-morning!" Bressac felt small in the presence of his father's land owner.

Jeanne noticed all this, and felt hurt to see that her mother would persist in showing her trousseau and linen, asking them to admire the beauty of the lace and the fineness of the underwear.

The arrival of Mademoiselle de Lansac and her nephews was a checkmate to Gaetana and Bressac.

The baroness had hoped she would take the place of Raoul's absent family. Bressac never dreamed that Raoul would have any other best man save himself. This would have been a matter of

pride to them both and have shown society how intimate they were with the Count de Mercoeur.

Jeanne had naïvely prevented this little machination to the despair of her mother, who thought Mademoiselle de Lansac was too countryfied and that the cousins were gawky, ill-dressed youths ; and Mademoiselle de Lansac could not compare with the title of baroness !

Still, her daughter wished it.

Mademoiselle de Lansac was not thoroughly well acquainted with the Parisian manners which permitted a social inferior to be introduced to his superior in salons, and she was obliged to recognize many of these curious introductions during the fortnight preceding the marriage, while a guest of Madame Berthout. One thing she was convinced of, that there was something abnormal in this union, and she did not hesitate to speak to Raoul of her surmises.

"I don't like the atmosphere of this establishment. Your future mother-in-law is about as elegant as one of my farmer's wives. The baroness, where does she come from ? And that Bressac—oh ! yes, I know he was your college chum ! And the Duchess of Roquemont, who smells of her petroleum. The duke sold his name

for her money. I think there must be some guilty understanding among you all. It is not natural, this wedding. I will be bound it is no love match on your side at any rate. You are ruined are you not? Spent every franc that you ever had?"

"Almost!"

"Then why are they giving you a fortune of over half a million, and a charming girl—for she is a charming girl; she is worth half a dozen of you. Oh, dear! I wish it was all over, and I could go back to Livone. I have had enough of your Paris." But Mademoiselle de Lansac did not talk like this when she was alone with Jeanne.

Jeanne was anxious to captivate the old lady, and one day she asked her quickly, "Who owns the chateau where Raoul used to live?"

The old lady hesitated before replying.

"I do not know, a foreigner bought it; but he has never come to claim his purchase." The dowager did not like to tell an untruth.

Then Jeanne said, "Will you keep my secret? I want to buy it back."

"What?"

"Yes! You know, under my marriage contract, that I shall not be able to dispose of my money

without Raoul's signature ; but before we are married I am my own mistress, and can spend my money as I please, and I should like to give a wedding present to my husband, but not as soon as we are married ; I will wait a while, till we are better acquainted. Oh, I'm sure he will be delighted to be able to return to the house where he was born. As you live so near, my aunt, won't you undertake the repurchasing of it for me ?"

"Very well, very well ! I am delighted to hear of your proposition ; this shall be a secret between us, that I promise you ; and I can lend you the necessary funds, if you will." The old lady placed her arms around her and kissed her. Jeanne was indeed worthy to become her niece, and in after years she never changed her opinion.

Raoul, ashamed of the life he was living, uneasy in his aunt's and *fiancée's* presence, embarrassed by his cousin's astonishment, feverishly nervous in Gaetana's and Bressac's company, felt his wedding day would be a day of deliverance.

It was a very grand wedding, and in spite of the heat of July many of his friends came to Paris for the ceremony. Madame Berthout gave magnificent donations to the church. The nuptial benediction was pronounced by the Papal Nuncio. If money

could have influenced his Holiness, he would not have been wanting.

Madame Berthout was willing to pay any price to give *éclat* to her daughter's espousals. As it was, the tenor of the Grand Opera House sang the "Salutaris," and Signora Marcheff came from La Scala to sing the "Sanctus" in her incomparable way.

When Aunt Economy saw the profusion of flowers, the magnificence of the dresses, and the jewels worn by the ladies, she repeated to herself the one idea she had had during her sojourn in Paris:

"I don't wonder these people bankrupt themselves as my nephew has done, if they live like this."

Then another idea entered her perplexed mind. "I hope he won't spend his wife's fortune." She was confident that Jeanne really loved her nephew, and that she was not flattered by the titled throng that had gathered at her wedding. She saw that Raoul and Jeanne were anxious to get away from Paris. Raoul had already whispered to Jeanne:

"It is one o'clock, the train does not leave until ten minutes past eight; another seven hours of martyrdom."

In the vestry there were congratulations and kisses and introductions. The guests, following

an old custom, marched past the bride and groom. It was almost a panorama to Aunt Economy.

"Monsieur Bressac, will you oblige me by taking the names of the guests, so that I may have them for the society papers?" requested Madame Berthout.

The announcement next day was in all the papers, and gave a detailed account of the marriage of Raoul, Count of Mercoeur, with Mademoiselle Jeanne Berthout, also a list of the guests and wedding presents, and wound up by saying that it was the finest wedding ever solemnized in Paris. This was another glorious triumph for Jeanne's mother.

During the past month Madame Berthout had had all her carriages repainted, and her initials taken off, to be replaced by a countess's coronet with nine points.

These nine points,—the number took complete possession of her. While on her bonnet she had nine rosebuds placed to simulate a coronet. On the menu of the wedding breakfast the coronet had a most prominent position.

"I never used it as much as you do, Madame," said Raoul laughingly.

The newly married couple and Mademoiselle de Lansac would infinitely have preferred a quiet

lunch in Madame Berthout's own house. This the widow vetoed. She was going to spend her money as she pleased.

"Invite her friends to a simple lunch!" she said. "No, indeed, that was no way to celebrate a wedding! People as well known as they, had their wedding receptions at a fashionable hotel, so people could see they were not ashamed of the alliance."

However, she was perfectly willing they should leave that evening for Monaco, Nice, or Mentone. They were so delighted with her complaisance, they made no further objections to her arranging the wedding to suit herself.

To visit Nice, as it was the summer, they would not meet any of their friends, or be bored by their attentions.

At half-past eight Mademoiselle de Lansac and her two nephews went to the Orleans station, and took the train for Livone; at ten minutes past eight Raoul and Jeanne had left Paris for the South.

Alone in their private compartment, it was a long time before either broke the silence. It seemed as if each was afraid to speak first. Jeanne was thinking of Aunt de Lansac, whose honesty and intelligence was so harmonious to her nature.

Raoul had before his eyes the everlasting smile

of Gaetana, and the hypocritical look of Bressac. Neither of them had ever spoken of the large sum he owed them, but he had been obliged to allow them to sign, as witnesses, Jeanne's marriage settlements, so they could not help seeing the exact amount of her personal fortune—it had been specified distinctly—the fortune which was the guarantee to them that he would pay his infamous debt.

"How could he ever pay it? Take back his note, and efface the moral boundary line that separated him from the young girl he had just married."

"Bah! Was he going to drown himself in remorse now? Had not the baroness told him, 'We will give you plenty of time to pay us.'"

Why should he think of the past, when Jeanne's hand was pressing his, and his wife broke the silence, saying:

"I love your aunt very dearly."

In these few words she threw so much tenderness that Raoul felt they were addressed to him; he fell on his knees in front of her, and placing his hand under her chin looked her in the face, and said, "Jeanne, will you always love me? Don't you see, dear, how wretched it is for a man to live alone after he has been tenderly cared for as a boy. Years without his family, almost without friends,

especially when chance throws him into a mäelstrom of follies which seem to engulf him, where everything seems empty and bad. It is enough to make one believe that consciences do not exist, and falsehoods reign supreme. I almost despaired. That was the position I was in when I met you. Oh, it was not long before I loved you. The first time I saw you I noticed how pretty you were ; it was not your good looks that caused me to love you. I recognized the innate purity and straightforwardness which are your prominent characteristics. You have revived the feelings of loyalty and sentiment which I thought were dead in me. Happily, they were only asleep."

Jeanne listened to these gentle words without any prudery, and frankly gave Raoul the key to her thoughts.

"I told you, Raoul, that my father was my only friend, and since his death life has seemed to me very barren and empty. Now that I am yours I can understand another existence is open to me. In this existence you shall be my guide and master. See, our meeting, our love was almost spontaneous, —that ought to encourage us to hope for future happiness ; we have both been brought up differently ; you in the ideas of rank, and fidelity to the

past ; your parents had a long line of glorious and renowned ancestry. I was brought up by a workman, a plebeian in the midst of his own factories, and still the same feelings of honor and uprightness were inculcated in both. It was that that drew us together in the beginning of our love. And for this purpose my father left me, so that I might be able to give you the respect I had for him."

Raoul was delighted with Jeanne's candor, and embraced her warmly. The conversation languished. She was so happy in the arms of the man of her heart ; too happy to talk. Paris, Gaetana, and Bressac were forgotten ; even the desired coronet,—all were buried for a nonce.

The business marriage had, through the unforeseen, developed into a union of hearts.

VII.

On the arrival of the young couple at Mentone, they received a telegram from Madame Berthout, saying she was coming on a visit to them, and they might expect her in two days. Jeanne and Raoul instinctively said "No!" and began to think how they could word a telegram advising her to remain in her own villa.

That evening they wrote her a long letter, telling her she had better stay in Paris, as it was very warm in the South, and nobody of distinction was there at that season. Jeanne added a postscript saying that she would write her, every day, full details of their tour.

In their walks they would often meet friends and acquaintances, such as one meets in all parts of Europe in traveling. To the many invitations extended to them to participate in the gayeties, Raoul would reply for both, "I am much obliged for your kind invitations, but we leave so soon it is impossible for us to accept." After seeing their names recorded as constant players at roulette, in

the salon of Monte Carlo, Raoul suggested that they would leave for Italy.

"It is a delightful trip, and I know it so well. I know Rome as well as Paris, so I can act as your cicerone, my Jeanne."

He thought he knew Italy, but did not know half as much as Jeanne did. She had read books of travels and geographies, to her advantage, more than he imagined, and was able to show Raoul many hidden beauties which he did not imagine existed. The weak nature of Raoul submitted entirely to the charming influence of his wife. This great happiness caused his entire forgetfulness of the world; and at the present time he lived for Jeanne alone. He felt as though his parents had only died a little while ago, and that Jeanne's love had come to fill up the gap,—to console him.

He became the brilliant gentleman, the witty talker, full of sudden gayety, and could pass the days doing nothing. He would rise early in the morning, so that he might have the pleasure of surprising Jeanne, as she woke up, with a bouquet of flowers, or some piece of bric-a-brac.

No more news from Paris; occasionally a letter from "Maman," who thought they were very selfish to leave her alone so long. Once in a while they

would find an old Parisian paper on some hotel table.

Raoul de Mercoeur was in love, very much in love, with his wife ; foolishly, as Bressac would have said, "and he was proud of it."

When he was in the club, and had heard of a man being in love with his wife, he would have said to himself, "imbecile."

At Naples, an important letter from Madame Berthout decided him to return to France ; so they took the steamer to Marseilles, and had a delightful voyage, and a good view of the Cornichs and the Chateau d'If.

"I don't know why it is," said Jeanne, "but I feel sorry to return to Paris."

It was a dismal, cloudy day when they reached Paris, and they also felt embarrassed at the luxurious way they were met at the station. A special omnibus for the trunks, a carriage for their valet and maid, and a victoria for themselves ; and Joseph, in a new blue and gold livery, as coachman. They had scarcely been in the house when Jeanne said, "It's stifling warm here." Jeanne did not want her husband to frequent the clubs any more, so she went over to her mother, and putting her arms around her said, coaxingly :

"No one knows we have arrived yet?"

"No one, my daughter; but why?"

"I will tell you. You know we love you, but the others, all the society, we don't like it at all; and if Raoul would allow me——"

Raoul knew better than not to approve of Jeanne's actions. Taking her hands, he said, "Whatever it is, I consent before I know what you are going to demand."

"Very well. Maman, your house at Bellevue is unoccupied. Madame San Rinazzi has returned to Paris, you wrote us. Will you lend us your house until the winter? You will come and see us, but no one but you, as I do not want anybody else to know that we are here,—we shall be so happy. Traveling from place to place sightseeing is not a real honeymoon, and we are tired of seeing people; we want a little rest. You consent, don't you, mother?"

To consent was a real sacrifice for Madame Berthout, she was anxious to have her daughter, the countess, to come and reside with her.

"Maman, we only want Joseph for a servant besides my maid."

Raoul added his voice to Jeanne's and said, "Maman" so caressingly to Madame Berthout that she consented in these words:

"You are very ungrateful."

For three months she had the courage to keep their secret. They had immediately left for the villa after gaining Madame Berthout's consent. Madame Berthout whenever she visited them asked them to return to Paris.

"After the New Year, Maman."

The idea of returning to Paris in a few weeks almost broke their hearts, as they had to go back and mix with the gay society of the capital.

Raoul's creditors had not troubled him at all. Could they allow themselves to become impatient with a customer whose wife was worth more than a million?

Gaetana and Bressac were never spoken of, and if the memory of them ever came to Raoul, a smile from Jeanne would soon cause them to be forgotten.

"I suppose I must call on you on New Year's Day," said Madame Berthout sarcastically.

"No, Maman!" said the count, "we recognize the respect you are entitled to."

The first of January found them both in Paris, where they had promised to spend the day with Madame Berthout, pleased to bring her the traditional bouquet of violets and box of bon-bons, and another piece of news.

"Maman, we will follow the old custom of placing at your feet our gifts and best wishes."

Raoul spoke slowly and pompously, knowing that long words and excessive homage delighted Jeanne's mother.

"Jeanne has something to tell you, and I leave you two together."

Madame Berthout cried tears of joy to think she was to be the grandmother of a viscount.

Mother of a countess, mother-in-law of a count, and grand-mother of a viscount, was too good to be true.

"My children, I must go and tell all my friends, immediately,—this very day."

"We had intended to give you that satisfaction, and now, as you have heard all the news and have accepted our best wishes, I think we shall return to Bellevue. This day week you can expect us permanently."

This was the last day of happiness.

So, delighted in having no New Year's calls to pay, they drove all over Paris, bought cakes and bonbons wholesale for the pleasure of giving them away to beggar children.

"This is our own day, my Jeanne."

Jeanne had ordered a magnificent dinner, and

on their return Joseph had illuminated the whole villa, and as his New Year's offering to his master and mistress he presented them with an immense bouquet. Jeanne ordered it to be placed in the center of the table, to the honest fellow's delight.

When the dinner was ready, Jeanne gravely knelt in front of her husband and said:

"My husband, I wish you a very happy year and a son, whom you will bring up to be an honest man."

Then she took his arm, trembling a little as he unrolled his table napkin.

"What is this, Jeanne?"

It was a lot of papers and parchments with official seals.

Raoul was afraid to read them.

"Jeanne, Jeanne, where did you get the thought." The name Chateau de Mercoeur had caught his eye.

"Well, we had to have a nest to live in when we go to visit your country and see your Aunt de Lansac."

This was the reason Jeanne never let him see his aunt's letters.

"*Tiens!*" he said roughly, taking Jeanne in his arms, "you bear my name with more credit than I do."

During the dinner Jeanne acted like a joyous child.

"Who would recognize in you my serious little wife?" Raoul said to her. Jeanne laughingly answered, "You have taken my character, and given me yours. You are a man and a master, why should I harass myself about the difficulties of life when you are by my side to direct me. You pretended you were wild once. Now you act very serious, it is my turn to be giddy."

This young woman was naturally of a serious, philosophical temperament, and to implant herself more completely in her husband's love she acted like a child. She loved and admired him, as she used to admire and love her father.

"People say marriages are a lottery. If that is true I have won a prize."

"Are you really so happy, Jeanne?"

"Yes, Raoul, my happiness surpasses my fondest expectations."

In the middle of the night the sound of wheels and a violent rapping at the door awoke them. Joseph went down to find out what was the cause of this untoward visit; he returned and whispered to his master, "It was Madame Berthout's coachman, who had driven down, as the telegraph office

was closed. Madame Berthout was very ill,—seriously so."

"My mother ill!" Jeanne arose. "Let us go at once, Raoul!"

"I am entirely at your orders."

It was a sorrowful drive; neither spoke, and the sound of the horses' hoofs on the frozen snow alone disturbed the silence.

Frequently Jeanne would open the window to ask the coachman what was the cause of her sickness.

"I can't tell you; this New Year's day every one is out. Could not find a doctor. Madame made a great many calls, however, she must have taken cold; she says she feels a great chill."

Jeanne threw herself back in the carriage, and nestled close up to Raoul as if to ask his protection in this coming trouble.

"I am afraid, Raoul."

They found all the servants up on their arrival.

Madame Berthout could only say, "Daughter, I am very ill, very ill."

Then she spoke of the chill she had taken and the difficulty she had in breathing.

"And all these carriages in the streets prevent me sleeping, and not a doctor to be had."

While Jeanne was trying to relieve her mother,

Raoul ordered the coachman and grooms to throw straw in front of the house, to deaden the sound of traffic. Then he went to the station house, and got a policeman to help him find a doctor. The police doctor answered his summons, thoroughly recognizing the fact that he was called out of his warm bed to give first medical assistance, and that he could not charge any fee.

The physician thought Madame Berthout's case very serious. He did not attempt to dissimulate his apprehension; and when the policeman asked for the ten francs, which the law allowed, the doctor whispered to Raoul, "Be careful of another chill, keep her warm." When Jeanne left him alone with Raoul for a moment he said, "Inflammation of the lungs is dangerous to a person of her age."

The following day the most eminent physicians of Paris were called in.

"Double pneumonia. Nine days to wait. If on the ninth day,——"

Nine days of anxiety and sorrow to Jeanne, she never left her mother a moment.

"Go and lie down, I will take your place by your mother's side!" After a great deal of persuasion she consented to sleep two hours in the day if Raoul would take her place by her mother's bedside.

The poor lady was flattered to be watched by a real count, even in her sickness.

"Oh, Monsieur le Comte! How kind you are!"

The entire household were ready to pay homage to the doctor, when he drove up in his carriage twice a day.

"What a charming man the doctor is!"

As all fashionable doctors are, he had the most exquisite manners and friendly way of entering the sick room, tenderly feeling the pulse of the invalid, while his countenance showed how he sympathized with his patients. He would prolong a visit into three quarters of an hour's duration, when he could say all he wanted to in two minutes.

In diagnosing Madame Berthout's case he would not commit himself to a favorable opinion until after the ninth day; he said there were cases where the most devoted attention and nursing proved of no avail.

Every day a bulletin was placed on the front door, and also a card tray was left in the vestibule, that the invalid's friends might be informed of her state. Madame Berthout was quite pleased to hear of the number of visits of inquiry.

Jeanne would not receive any visitors. Raoul spent his days with her. Stunned almost at the

thought that a cloud had come to mar the beauty of the horizon.

How disgusted he would have been had he heard Gaetana tell Bressac, in a doleful tone, suitable to the occasion :

" Just as I predicted, your friend will be a millionaire before long ; I never imagined I was such a good prophetess."

On the evening of the ninth day, the doctor declared that Madame Berthout's case was hopeless.

" If she has her will to make, or wishes to receive the sacraments, I think she had better attend to it at once."

A little while after this Jeanne had a table with a white cloth and silver candlesticks placed near the bed ; the room looked like a chamber of death. Madame Berthout's confessor came and she received the sacraments, but in her confession she never thought to accuse herself of the greatest of all her sins, her vanity, which allowed her to barter her daughter for a ruined count's title. This was her consolation in dying, to see that her daughter was a great lady. In her dying moments it gave her more pleasure to call Raoul M. le Comte, than " my son." Her last words were :

"There is no one that can take your title of countess away from you. Adieu, my children!"

Her sufferings lasted till dawn of day.

Jeanne held her mother's dying hand in hers. Raoul supported her with his arm.

It was now true she had no one but him to love. Madame Berthout's body was almost cold before Raoul could induce his wife to leave it.

She said, "Raoul, our happiness was too great to last."

Daylight, cold and wintry, was struggling to gain entrance through the closed shutters.

The Sisters of Bon Secour arranged the body for the coffin.

Occasionally Raoul would think of his mother's coffin, and her death bed, and how she lay in state in the grand salon of the chateau. Thanks to his wife's love, it was again his chateau. Tears came to his eyes, and he also remembered that he had no one left but Jeanne.

Jeanne thought of her life as a girl; how quickly it had fled. First her father died, then her mother, and seeing Raoul's tears she went over to him and said, "We are indeed alone," and threw her arms around his neck and cried to break her heart.

The news of the death traveled quickly; the

numbers of callers increased tenfold. It was a certain solemn joy to Joseph to bring to his master every evening the great pack of visiting cards, as evidence of the interest and kindly feeling toward the family.

Mechanically Raoul glanced them over. Two names struck him, names that he saw everywhere,—a constant reminder before his eyes.

Jean Marie Bressac.

Baroness Gaetana de San Rinazzi.

He let the whole pack fall to the floor unheeded.

VIII.

THE same guests that had six months before been invited to the wedding now in somber costume and solemn countenances attended the funeral, and the same singers rendered the requiem as sang the wedding march.

The high altar, such as is used for rich persons' funerals, the dozen priests, stoled in black vestments, the master of the ceremonies, a portly Swiss, more dignified than an ambassador.

A magnificent funeral, as it had been a wedding at the same church.

The difference of their views and characters prevented there ever having existed any congeniality between Jeanne and her mother ; but death, sudden death, which had carried off all the family, left Jeanne with a void in her life.

In the carriage going to the cemetery, in the midst of her sorrow, she could not resist concentrating all her thoughts on Raoul.

Raoul absorbed all her life and her love. She cried quietly. She had desired to follow her

mother's body to the grave, so she must not show any signs of weakness at the last moment.

On reaching the cemetery, she saw her mother's coupé unoccupied, with the lamps lit, covered with crape; she was shocked at this absurd style of putting horses and lamps in mourning.

"Do poor people need all this ceremony to mourn those whom they love?" and in disgust of the hypocritical attempt at sorrow, it was a certain amount of consolation to know that she was her own mistress, and could regulate her style of living to suit herself, leaning on an upright, honest man, whom fortune had given her for a husband.

She attributed to sorrow the abasement which seemed to weigh Raoul down, and was grateful to him for his sympathy. She could not guess the suffering and humiliation which tortured her husband, this rough awakening to her dream of happiness.

Instinctively she had not sent any invitation to the funeral to either Bressac or the baroness, but Bressac and the baroness were there, and gave an example of correct deportment, with their affectionate condolences.

"Poor friend."

"Dear little one!"

While the priest was sprinkling the grave with holy water, they approached Jeanne and Raoul. If they had dared they would have returned home with them. In making an offer of their undying devotion Bressac whispered in Gaetana's ear:

"Our friend is now a millionaire. Is it not time to suggest a little payment?"

"No, no! Not yet. It would not do for him to have to tell his wife he owed three hundred thousand francs, and it needed her signature, before he could draw the money. Wait for her grief to subside a little, before we broach the subject; tradesmen's daughters always hold the purse strings tight."

Bressac shrugged his shoulders and muttered, "Absurd delay. Useless delicacy on your part."

"Mon cher, on such occasions as this I give credit for one year, and the young countess will soon see how quick 'Maman' made the money fly. No, no! we will let the matter rest, we hold the Count of Mercoeur, he will surely pay us."

Then noticing that the Duchess of Roquemont was straining her ear to listen to what they were saying, Gaetana murmured audibly:

"Dear Lord, grant the poor departed a place in heaven."

Jeanne tried hard to check her tears while thanking these ladies for their sympathy. The kisses of the baroness and the compassionate sadness of Bressac's face almost reconciled her toward these two, whom for so long a time she distrusted and entertained a certain repugnance.

Jeanne had now to take charge of the house and her fortune, "Our fortune," she said to Raoul, "as all I possess belongs to you."

"Oh, Jeanne! Jeanne!" the words choked in his throat, he wished he had the courage to avow his complete indebtedness, if only he could say to her, "I'm miserable, I lied to you, I sold my name, to do which I had to lose all sense of honor and delicacy, but you have regenerated me, and made an honest man of me."

He was afraid. He remembered the card Jeanne picked up at the Matrimonial Agency, and how she tore it to pieces, and had thrown it out of doors, saying, "Isn't it disgraceful?"

It was not only Jeanne's love that he required but also her esteem. To say that he was guilty,—guilty of a baseness that no true woman would ever forgive, he would lose her forever. At these thoughts he stopped just as he was going to betray

himself, and said, "Jeanne, Jeanne, my adored one."

The wants of the household and the business attending her mother's decease, allowed Jeanne to forget her recent bereavement. Her practical mind was astonished at the careless and indifferent way her mother had kept her accounts. Patiently she tried to unravel the tangled skein. When her work was finished she said to Raoul, "They deceived you regarding the amount of my fortune, they said I had a million and a half; we have, but my mother kept such a retinue of servants, and spent so much money, that after her debts are paid we shall only have twelve hundred thousand francs."

Raoul answered her with a kiss, then he said:

"Did you ever think that I dreamt of your fortune? Your mother was a young-looking and healthy woman. It's true she lived extravagantly. We will retrench, and send away all useless servants. All I ask is to be permitted to retain my faithful Joseph, he can be our coachman and butler. We don't care to live in style, all we want is to be happy, not live in false luxury."

A short while after Madame Berthout's death the tradesmen whose bills had not been paid sent them

in. Jeanne saw that all her trousseau had been purchased on credit, she went to her mother's bankers to sell some bonds, and she learned that her mother had been speculating in the Bourse and had lost a hundred thousand francs.

Two years of wasting money, flinging it hither and thither, contracting debts—even the dressmaker had not been paid.

As these things became evident, she said smilingly to Raoul, "My son will be poorer than we thought he would."

She made excuses for her lack of fortune which grated on Raoul's ears, as though she penniless would be valueless.

"Well, if our son will be poor, I'll work to make a fortune as large as grandfather's."

"Ah!—that's what you are thinking about, is it? I have noticed for the past month you were very pensive!"

When the legion of creditors heard through the bankers that the Countess of Mercoeur was paying all debts, Raoul's creditors began sending their bills, and with the subtilty of Parisian tradesmen, they addressed all the bills to Madame le Comtesse de Mercoeur.

Jeanne said nothing, but asked Raoul if the bills were correct.

"It is much better to pay all your bills as I am paying my mother's. I have always had a horror of debt;" and with the most delicate feeling Jeanne never asked any questions, mixing his accounts with those of her mother's.

"Who would guess that millionaires as we ought to be should be so much in debt?"

Millionaire, a million, this was the exact amount of their fortune. Fifty thousand francs income, and a cottage at Bellevue, and Aunt de Lansac had not sent her account in for the repurchasing of Mercoeur. She had written to Jeanne: "We will settle that business when we meet."

Jeanne wanted to go to Mercoeur, Raoul found one pretext and another to keep her in Paris for the past two months; he had felt wretched, during which time his mind was absorbed by the falseness of his situation.

In the past there was only one terrible souvenir, the promissory note given to the baroness, to be paid out of Jeanne's fortune. If the baroness had the audacity to present her bill to the countess,—as the other creditors had done!

No! that is not to be feared; but—the three

hundred thousand francs, he must get them to take up his note, and to be able to shut the door in the face of these two adventurers. Up till now his wife's mourning had been sufficient excuse to close the door to all visitors; but in six months or a year——

He thought he would tell Jeanne that he had lost three hundred thousand francs in a speculation. But he would have to lie to Jeanne. Lie! to her! it would be his first, and in her presence he could not. She might guess all, read his very thoughts. No, he must try and win this sum. The figure made him tremble.

"Oh! I was crazy to pledge myself! Alas, what resources had I left? One word from the baroness might break up my home. I signed it—I owe it,—I must pay it."

Occasionally he muttered, "If they tried to make me pay through a legal process, it would be easy to prove blackmail and extortion. Fancy me being brought into a law court. People would say I was their accomplice. Blackmailers, such as they are. My Jeanne whom I love, and who is the joy of my life, it is at the cost of being a scoundrel that I won her. How vile it seems to me now. Better had I blown my brains out. Shall I do it now?"

This was the only solution of the difficulty which he saw, but he could not face death tranquilly now as he could have done some time ago. He did not want to die, to renounce all his happiness. His struggle against himself was carried on vigorously. Since being in contact with Jeanne, and knowing her disgust for anything that was dishonorable, he had learned the lesson. An honest man pays his debts, and does not kill himself to escape them.

Then he thought he would insure his life for three hundred thousand francs, pay the first premium, and fall as if by accident under the wheels of a carriage, and thus die without the disgrace of having to commit suicide. The idea seemed feasible to him. He went to see two companies, and the only result of his visit was they both refused to insure his life,—as the wounds he had received at Patay were liable to reopen and he might die of hæmorrhage.

He had been able to sell his name and title, but no one wanted his life. Was it worthless?

These were the reasons why he told Jeanne that he was going to seek employment. He commenced to see trouble ahead, even his dreams were not free from the harassing thought that he had to earn

three hundred thousand francs. He did not care what the business was, whether it was dry goods, financiering, or manufacturing tallow candles, he felt capable of rendering himself his slave to his wants, with one object in view. Jeanne encouraged him, saying, "You can have part of our capital."

He spent whole days visiting different offices of brokers and lawyers who had businesses for sale. He found nothing to suit him, as he had no commercial experience. Another thing, he had become miserly about spending his wife's fortune, and would not be induced to invest one cent of it, unless he saw an absolute certainty of gaining two.

The month rolled on. He found nothing but discouragement. Despairing of success, he thought he would go and see his own money lenders, men who did their business by calling themselves "real estate agents." In these days usurers are not misers, living in wretched hovels, depriving themselves of necessities to be enabled to loan more money. Parisian usurers live very comfortably, generally keep two good servants, a good cook, live in nice new houses, well furnished, having cosy offices to transact their business, with only a large safe to distinguish it from the library of a literary man. Heavy draperies and portières to prevent a

third party overhearing any transaction that might take place, and receiving no visitors unless they make an appointment. Such are our money-lenders of to-day.

After calling on many of these gentry, Raoul's last hope was in Van Dernicht. Van Dernicht never refused any business until he had investigated it thoroughly. He was wise enough never to allow a possible client to escape him until he found there was nothing to be gained thereby, whether he was a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, or Mussulman, French, Dutch, or German. In reply to all questions, relating to his nationality, religion and opinions, Van Dernicht only answered :

" A business man, at your service."

He was middle-aged, thin and bald, almost lost beneath his heavy black clothes ; he dyed his mustache, which formed a strange contrast with his heavy white beard. He had an hypocritical look about him, downcast eyes, which only appeared to possess any animation when he was talking about money.

To try and define what his business was would be difficult. He did anything that would bring him money. Bought notes of minors, sold mines on commission, attended to bankrupts, scheduled

their debts, compromising with their creditors, lent money on diamonds, got up fictitious auctions of old masters (that had just been painted in Paris), and would hire his name to actresses who would not rent apartments in their own to prevent the sheriff seizing their furniture for debt.

"Van Dernicht," said Bressac, who knew him thoroughly, "is the king of scoundrels, and prince of usurers."

He had been extremely accommodating to Raoul on several occasions, and only asked fair interest for his money.

Raoul went to Van Dernicht one evening after having notified him to be at home. Raoul opened the conversation abruptly: "I am the Count of Mercoeur, I want three hundred thousand francs!"

"Three hundred thousand francs?"

In spite of his usual stolidity, Van Dernicht raised the shade of his lamp to look at his client better.

"Three hundred thousand francs, Monsieur le Comte?"

"Yes! did you not hear what I said?"

"And—what security?"

"My signature!"

Van Dernicht would have liked to have replied,

"Your signature is not worth the paper it would be written on," but he said plausibly,

"Very well. I will see what I can do actively. Is there no one else but me whom you can apply to?"

This was a usual answer of Van Dernicht's.

After this conversation Raoul came to him regularly twice a week to hear his stereotyped answer.

"In the present state of affairs, money is very hard to obtain, but I am doing my best for you."

Van Dernicht had a special envelope, on whose cover was written: "Affairs of the Count of Mercoeur."

To-day an old and honorable name and title will always find a purchaser among unscrupulous financiers who desire to make a fine show on their prospectus. Van Dernicht was anxious to get Raoul involved in one of these schemes.

Without being absolutely certain, he imagined how Raoul got married. His marriage was evidently arranged through some broker, and as he had bartered his name once, why not try him again.

To find money for a man who had not one cent of his own, was not to be talked about.

"No capitalist would advance you the money,

M. le Comte, not one! You will have to embark in some speculation."

Raoul looked at him attentively, "Why! that is just what I want, I have been looking for something."

Then Van Dernicht decided to tell him of a superb plan he had, a new system of colonial agriculture, a wonderful system which would enrich the emigrants.

There would have to be emigrants to create a new France, to give honor, glory, and fortune to those that form the company and directors. It was to be an enterprise that would make the old East India Company blush.

Raoul hoped for two days!

Unfortunately, Van Dernicht had told him the name of the originator of this plan. He turned out to be an adventurer, and two days later was arrested for forgery. Van Dernicht swore to Raoul in a most innocent way:

"If you had known him, you would have taken your oath he was the most honest man in the world."

Raoul felt himself saved from a terrible temptation; he ceased his visits to Van Dernicht. Jeanne began to find fault at his constant absence from home.

"What a craving for money you have; we have more than enough to live upon."

"Did you not tell me yourself that I ought to work?"

"Yes, but later on. I am lonesome. Your first duty is to me,—your second is to yourself. I don't like to see your forehead so wrinkled. I shall begin to think you are not happy. For the last two months you seem to have forgotten all pleasures in this pursuit of money, the very thought of it seems to intoxicate you. This is not the way to win a fortune. Little by little, constant and steady work, sometimes years of labor, before one can hope to amass a good comfortable income. These speculations on the Bourse and colonization schemes are only traps for the unwary; only one or two ever make anything out of it."

Still it was through these speculations which Jeanne despised, that Raoul expected to make his fortune unknown to her. When his wife spoke like this, he became more serious, thinking over the utter impossibility of ever asking her forgiveness.

The happiness of being a father dispelled these clouds for a little while.

Aunt de Lansac was very angry at Jeanne's not

going to the chateau, where all the Counts of Mercoeur for centuries had been born. The pretty letter which Jeanne wrote pacified her, and she sent her grand-nephew a beautiful frock to be baptized in.

"As you had no mother, Jeanne, we will make the pretty little clothes together."

When Raoul would go to the club or Bois, Jeanne would shut herself in her room, sorry to be alone, and looking at the portrait of her father, and that of her husband's, she would wonder which loved her the best. She would then go to the nursery and look at her son sleeping so peacefully, with his Normandy nurse at his side, and would ask herself if he was really hers, jealous of the nurse who could sit by him all day long.

Raoul never thought of the agony of the past few months he had endured, his weak and undecided character let him forget the past and the present. He returned to the happiness of the first months of marriage, perfectly content to spend the whole day with Jeanne and his son. It was now Jeanne's turn to look pensive; she had a great care and charge before her, and felt her responsibility.

"We will give a baptismal party," she said to Raoul. "We shall be obliged to invite some

friends, though we are in mourning, but from then on we will live for ourselves ; we three."

Raoul had the delicacy of feeling to give his son the name of his wife's father. They never went out except to accompany the child in his drives.

In their desire to be alone they gave orders to Joseph to send out the invitations and announcement of the birth of the little viscount. They received many letters of congratulation and reproach at their ignoring all social customs, living apart from the world as though they were savages.

"Poor Mercoeur," said the Duchess of Roquemont, "he is buried for life. I judged his wife correctly—a little bourgeoise."

And the Baroness San Rinazzi answered in her soft voice :

"They are very excusable, this young couple, they are so much in love with each other. As you know, it was a love match."

IX.

These last three months of tranquil happiness quickly passed away.

It seemed to Jeanne and Raoul that their child had always been a part of their existence, as though its cries and smiles and shy kisses had always been theirs.

"Say, we will have to introduce him to our friends, we can't keep him forever hidden."

Both of them repeated the phrase to each other. They had sent out a few invitations to a private dinner. Jeanne had selected two old friends of her father's and Raoul two old playmates, ladies of the highest rank and birth, and the old General Moustel, who was a far away cousin.

They had lived so long in their own private apartments that the large and elegantly furnished parlors of Madame Berthout looked too garish to suit their tastes. The gilt and white furniture, with its brilliant satin coverings and the real lace curtains looked out of place in a household who were still wearing mourning.

"We cannot receive our friends in that room as it is furnished now," Jeanne said. They immediately began to select new furniture and draperies, spending entire days choosing some quaint piece of furniture. Jeanne held a daily reception to which cabinet makers and upholsterers were the only guests. Raoul would frequent auctions and purchase largely, though with perfect taste, objects of art and bric-a-brac to adorn the cabinets.

They were delighted to find how much real pleasure it gave them, this new attraction, and it gradually dawned upon them that hitherto their lives had been spent too selfishly and they perceived how egotistical their existence had been since their marriage.

"Raoul, I was wrong to exact so much of your time. I wanted you for yourself alone. I was too selfish. Now, I want you to invite all your friends to come and see us. I must not imagine that my company alone will be sufficient to amuse you."

Raoul protested, saying, "Jeanne's society was all he wanted." But she, with her common sense, said that her life might satisfy her in its tranquillity, but that her husband had always been used to society and after a while the present monotonous existence would tire, and likely enough he would

desire the club life he had been accustomed to. Hence, before that day came she would make his home gay and bright so that he would have no desire to go elsewhere.

"Wise woman you are, Jeanne."

The pleasure of seeing their friends quite elated them now they had got used to the idea. "The salon well lighted, plenty of flowers for the women, supper served in the conservatory, and my boudoir for a card room—it will be delightful," cried Jeanne gayly.

At their first dinner party Jeanne and Raoul were full of happiness. It was the anniversary of their wedding, Jeanne wore an exquisite costume of white crêpe, unrelieved by a single ornament.

The old general was the first to arrive, and when he had congratulated Jeanne on her appearance he took Raoul aside and whispered :

"My boy, you can't deny it, but you had wonderful good luck. Eh !"

The young cousins of Raoul's, Combat and de Lansac, had availed themselves of this opportunity to come again to Paris. Aunt de Lansac declined the invitation, saying she would await her nephew and niece's visit to Mercoeur ; as at her age traveling had ceased to be a pleasure.

Madame St Leon avowed her visit was to see the baby ; she asked for him to be brought to her ; when he was she thought him superb. So fat and healthy.

The Countess Dallon was seated opposite to Jeanne, and she smiled at Raoul significantly, which significance meant, "My congratulations, your wife is charming." The Marquis L'Essaumes, whose hobby was agriculture, was delighted to meet Messieurs Louden and Chappe, old friends of Jeanne's father's, whose agricultural machinery was celebrated,—their factory was in Rue Charrone.

There was that undercurrent of sympathetic good feeling between the hosts and their guests, in spite of the difference in social rank.

Suddenly, Raoul heard a noise in the reception room, and Joseph saying, "But no, sir, no sir."

Then he saw Joseph's head at the door.

"If you please, sir, could I speak to you ?"

Raoul immediately arose and went out to see what was the cause of the interruption. His cheek became pallid when he saw de Bressac, his overcoat over his arm, and dressed in full evening dress.

There was a painful silence between these men

for a few seconds, then Bressac hissed, "So my place was not set at table?"

"You certainly astonish me," Raoul curtly said. "Come here!" he invited him into his private smoking room.

"Now what are you here for? What do you want?"

"I would rather leave that to your imagination."

"But, to-night, it's impossible, my guests."

"Ah! yes, you invite your friends, but are afraid to invite your creditors. Still, until to-day you cannot say they have bothered you much, as other creditors have done. You certainly owe them some regard, some thanks."

Raoul was completely taken aback; this time his dream was over. The awakening had been too abrupt, the sufferings were intense.

"You have a very short memory, Raoul, you quickly forget important services have been rendered you. Since your marriage — a marriage which was your financial redemption, you have lost no opportunity to slight me—and seriously."

"Ah! Hush! Hush! You talk so coolly of things which I could not prevent."

"So! so! You would like to call me a rascal! Card on the table face up, dear friend. So, if I am

a rascal what are you? Have you forgotten? I am going to refresh your memory. Your dinner is not yet served, it's only half-past six; I have half an hour."

Bressac calmly laid his coat over the back of a chair and sat down opposite Raoul, and fixing his cold gray eyes on him said, with a harsh, dry laugh, at intervals:

"It is over a year. It begins like a story book. You were ruined, no resources left, nothing even to pawn, there was only death left, you were in despair. 'Bressac, dear Bressac, your chum Bressac,' took you by the hand, took you to Bellevue, and through the kindness of his friend Gaetana you made in less than a month the finest match that was ever made. It was a business transaction in which you were the figurehead and we the silent partners. It's only fair to pay your associates their portion of the spoils you obtained. It seems to me that's only fair. This first year has passed without a word, without a sign from you. You go to Nice, Italy, and return to Paris, to Bellevue, without informing us. Mourning in your family alone gave us the opportunity of shaking your hand; still, you thought it only respectful to invite us to the funeral. So you had not forgotten us then. Why, then, should you

leave us out on your entrance formally into society and the anniversary of a marriage we concocted. You certainly must have omitted to invite us, forgetting we are still partners. I have come to collect my portion of the fortune with which you cut such a dash. Stop, don't commence to tremble like that, or your friends will think you have been caught in some nefarious intrigue."

Raoul was trembling with temper and indignation, wishing to throw the intruder out of the window, the wretch who so openly insulted his happiness. How could he throw him out? The color left his cheeks at the thought.

He must pay him first, and if he got the money to pay him he must reveal the whole affair to his wife. How could he in her present condition ; far from well, and still in the first joy of happy maternity. This would be a terrible blow to her.

Bressac was negligently looking over Raoul's album, awaiting a reply.

"It's very nice here. I will come and see you occasionally."

"Listen, Bressac. My conduct might have been ignoble, and I had to give you both my note to accomplish a bad deed. You are right, I had got to the end of my tether ; almost in despair, I married,

as many of my acquaintances have done. You pretend to be astonished to find me a devoted husband, instead of a *roué* who spends his wife's fortune on others,—as he only married as a speculation. You are astonished to find me at the end of a year of married life a changed man, almost a bourgeois. It's true, I am ; and the years of ruined life appall me when I recall their follies. I propose to become a thoroughly respectable member of society, not a scoundrel ; an honest man in the entire acceptation of the word. I have——"

Raoul was interrupted by Bressac's hearty laugh.

"My conscience! If I had any influence at the Academy you should certainly be the recipient of the Prix Montyon. That would allow you to pay your just debts."

Raoul had been a hero almost during the war, his name honorably mentioned on three different occasions on the official dispatches of General Charrette ; courage was natural to him, but he lacked it before this bandit, whose glance and word seemed to strike terror into his heart. He lacked courage simply because he felt the truth of the other's words, and knew he was culpable. He was terribly humiliated.

"Wait! don't drive me crazy ; it's awful to be

thus spoken to! I can't pay you to-night this immense sum of money. I have never forgotten the debt, I swear it; for three months I hunted Paris to find some means whereby I could pay it. I found nothing."

"What about your wife's fortune?"

"I should have to obtain her signature."

"Is not that signature quickly given when one's wife is in love with one?"

"Bressac, don't laugh at our love; it's too sacred for that. I won't allow you to, either. It does not concern you. My wife's fortune is already nearly a million less than it was, but I will and must find the three hundred thousand francs. Since my child's birth I have ceased to look, I lost courage. But to-morrow I will try again. I have not asked my relatives in Gascony. In two or three months you will be paid; it's now July, give me until September. The end of September, on the word of a gentleman."

"Until then, then! Nothing on account? What, nothing? I give my word I need fifty louis badly to-night."

"This evening I have not so much about me,—I will send them in the morning."

"Never mind, just order another place laid at

table. No doubt your guests will play cards after supper. I am very fond of playing ! "

Raoul felt the blood rush to his head at this cool proposition.

" You have been so long paying the debt that the interest would amount to a considerable sum. Now we shall not exact monetary interest, but you will not forget to invite us in the future often to your house, especially when you have select company. You intend to have a reception every week, I understand. The Baroness San Rinazzi and your old friend Bressac will always favor you with their company. The baroness is a very correct and lady-like woman, received everywhere. She was at the Papal Nuncio reception last night, and as your friend is received in the most exclusive circles, now, like a good fellow, take me in and introduce me to General Moustel ; he is the only one of your guests I am not acquainted with. Now take all the wrinkles out of your forehead and be yourself again. Throw dull care to the dogs, away with all notions of delicacy, remember the world is composed of dupers and their dupes ; be careful not to be counted among the latter."

And Bressac, entirely at his ease, amiable gossiper and with a well turned phrase, quite capti-

vated the general and the Countess Dallon ; and the Marquise L'Essaumes asked of this polished knave, whose audacity had given him a foothold in the inner circle of fashionable society, "Monsieur Bressac, how much was collected yesterday at the fair of the Magdalens ?"

"Much less, Madame, than if you had been there."

"I am too old to beg," said the marquise.

"And I not young enough," said the countess.

"Ladies, you can't make me believe that; the Duchess of Roquemont got five hundred francs with only a captain for her escort."

"Your friend the baroness ?"

"Madame de San Rinazzi reaped a harvest, and quite depleted the pockets of the young folk ; I believe she collected over three thousand francs."

"Why, really ! Oh ! she had a talent for begging," the countess smilingly said. "We must not inquire who was her escort."

"It was I, Madame ; a poor and humble person."

Jeanne whispered to Raoul, "I did not think you would invite Bressac."

"He came on business, and as he was dressed, I urged him to stay."

Society was always cordial to de Bressac ; he had

the tact to always say the right thing at the right time, and knew how to be agreeable to every one. There was only one thing about him, it was his eyes; they had a false luster and could not look a person in the face.

During the course of the evening he sat at the card table for a few minutes, and after a game or two arose, saying, "My luck is too poor to-night."

The Marquise L'Essaumes, knowing he had won about eight hundred francs, asked him:

"Can't I solicit out of your winnings something for the poor?"

Bressac gallantly replied:

"Represented by you, Madame, the poor shall have half."

And he gave her half his winnings.

When he was leaving, Raoul and Jeanne invited him to visit them; she said, "On Thursday we receive our friends, and shall be delighted to see you, only our reception will be very quiet, as my mother has only been dead such a short time."

X.

JEAN MARIE BRESSAC has gained fourteen prizes.

When his father heard the announcement at the Lycée at Toulouse, it fully repaid him for the ten years' privation he and his wife had undergone to give their son an education to make him a gentleman.

The old farmer was the bailiff on Mademoiselle de Lansac's farm, and reckoned among one of the most honest men in the village.

The son had first been sent to a seminary to see if he could not be made a priest, but was expelled for insubordination. Now he had gained all the best prizes at Toulouse. This was rather a compensation to the father. When they reached Livone, almost the entire village turned out to welcome the winner of such distinction.

When the admiration subsided the good Livonaise would talk of Jean Marie as a progressive youth who knew everything.

He was anxious to go to Paris, which city at this early date exercised a subtle fascination for him;

his father would not hear of it and placed him in the office of Lawyer Lousseteau.

"Fifty francs a year salary — fifty francs a year," he would growl, *sotto voce*, while copying some deed. "Nice income that for a fellow who gained distinction at the university. Clerk to a lawyer, pah! Yes! Clerk to a pettifogging attorney!"

This however was a considerable social gain on his father's status. A small farmer whose cornfields and vineyard were earned after thirty years' incessant and laborious toil, and whose only ambition was now to save enough to establish their beloved idol in business when he should have studied law enough to plead before the petit sessions at Livone.

Unfortunately, one day after a party where Jean Marie had lost considerably at cards, a rumor arose which echoed throughout the county side, and which Joseph recalled when he uttered, "As if they did not know what kind of a fellow he was at Livone."

Seven or eight thousand francs had been taken that morning out of M. Lousseteau's safe. The echo said that the lawyer was going to institute legal proceedings against some one. There were

mysterious comings and goings between the farmer and the lawyer. Then the whole affair dropped quietly ; it was silenced, though never forgotten.

One thing certain was that Jean Marie Bressac left Livone, and his parents told all inquirers that their son had gone to Paris to gain his fortune.

Gone to Paris to gain his fortune.

Gain a fortune—without knowing exactly how or by what means ; having taste for no business, but a great capacity for enjoying life.

First he dabbled in wheat, then advertising, and stayed for some length of time a curbstone broker on the Bourse—the temple whose Corinthian columns open wide to allow all who choose to enter and lose their fortune. De Bressac was in many financial schemes, and many dupes would look for him and their vanished gold.

The profession of broker had a charm for him. He could arrive late in the morning, just in time for lunch. It was useless to be at the Bourse early ; from two until four you could talk with your acquaintances. Friendships were here formed. Introductions casually given were often of great assistance. As long as he could make his five hundred to a thousand francs a month by watching the market, he was very content. After four o'clock,

a walk along the boulevard and a stroll into his club, a few minutes at the card table, then home for dinner, after which the theater and a few social calls filled in the day.

This is what Bressac liked. Studious, observing, acquiring little by little the manner and style of a society man, distrusting the fair sex completely, and firmly believing that rank did not alter the moral tone of women. To him his mother was the only virtuous woman that ever existed.

As a boy he had been a great admirer of Raoul, Pontais, and of the Duke de Roquemont ; they had been companions at the Lycée. He remembered the intimacy on his arrival in Paris, and by them was introduced into society. As he made more money at cards than at the Bourse, he decided to live by them. His best friends did nothing, why should he not imitate them ?

Four years after his arrival in Paris, Bressac was considered one of the most fashionable men—received in the best and most exclusive society.

Occasionally it would be asked :

" Has he any money ? "

His friends would answer :

" He has sold his property in the South and has invested it well, and made a comfortable fortune."

How could society ask for a passport from this elegant gentleman, who gave his services so freely for all charitable societies.

If a lady would inquire :

" You are from the South, aren't you ? "

" More than a Southerner, Madame—a Gascon, from the center of Gascony."

He was not a trifle afraid of the misconception most persons had of the South, thinking all Southerners lazy. Travelers were often much astonished at the industry of the Southern peasants, who were up before the lark, plowing and cultivating their farms.

It was only the middle class that were generally indisposed to work. The peasant class were not only industrious, but ambitious besides. Bressac was brought up on a farm, knowing that his parents lived on black bread and vegetable soup, saving a cent with the thrifty prudence of an Israelite, with their object always in view—money for him.

He had the habit of reflecting and directing his life carefully. Brought up to be a *soi-disant* gentleman, he cared very little for his parents ; he considered them his inferiors. Ashamed of their toil hardened hands and his mother's peasant dres , he had, however, inherited their calculating spirit, looking for gain and benefit from everything.

They had not, however, been able to transmit their honesty, as there had never been any intimacy between them. He was educated at school while they toiled morning, noon, and night for the means whereby he would be made a curse instead of a blessing to them.

The hazard of Bressac's life soon took the small remnant of honesty he possessed; he was a scamp, a thorough-paced scoundrel, who hid his real nature under a polished exterior. He never intended to be a business man, knowing that unless a man had enough capital it was difficult to even gain a livelihood. He was anxious to live luxuriously and without work. The Bourse allowed him to.

Now he had gone beyond that point, and he was a society swell.

"Ah! Bressac is a nice fellow, a good liver, a sportsman."

He was invited to parties every night, and each evening, after having paid his homage to the hostess, he would seek the card room. The respectable card room, where the cards are dealt while the dealers gossip about the last game, and where the stakes rarely exceed five francs. He pretended to play mechanically, while the young girls were angling for husbands. He, Bressac, never took up

a card ; he would not permit the other players to guess the cards he held—he contented himself with winning two or three hundred francs, never more. This is what he lived on. He played cards as regularly as a workman goes to work.

He used to find it profitable to assist Dame Fortune.

"It is not enough to trust to chance," he would say to himself, "she needs assistance."

If any one had ever suggested that Bressac cheated at cards, twenty voices would check the audacious one.

"Bressac a gambler!" said Roquemont ; "what nonsense. He plays at small parties to make up a game through politeness, but you will never see him at a gambling table where there is high play, unless we forcibly carried him there."

This was a careful calculation on Bressac's part, never to be induced to play with men only, or for high stakes.

His rooms were a marvel of good taste in furnishing—so harmonious ; all old oak and bronze ; he detested gilt and tawdry furniture.

None of his most intimate acquaintances ever saw a woman in his chambers. His friends' lady-loves were always delighted to take supper at his place, it

was always so *recherché*, and such delightful company, though to himself he would say :

" The loveliest woman is not worth a good book, for my part."

He rather prided himself in being an artist in *genre* like others. He bought a zither at an auction and had hung it over his piano. (Who would imagine it was there only for ornament.)

The following morning Bressac awoke feeling very well satisfied with his evening's work at the Mercoeur's.

" Well managed ; cleverly done."

Then he took up his mail and newspaper, which were on a table by his bedside.

" Ah ! The ——! I never thought about it."

He rang. His valet, a model of Parisian servitude, answered promptly ; he was a most correct waiting man, with his well shaven face and black livery, though his expression denoted that he was as real a rascal as his master.

" Did you desire me, Monsieur ?"

" Has the bank sent any clerk here yet ?"

" No, sir."

" Here are five hundred francs to pay a note which they will collect."

It was admiration for his employer that kept this man in such respectful attention; he, perhaps, the only person who guessed how de Bressac lived, and how he always paid his notes directly they were presented.

"One would think he dug the money up from a *caché* during the night, whenever he has a note to meet," thought the valet. Never did this wise man allow paper of his to be protested.

"Antoine," continued Bressac, "breakfast for two. Let it be ready before twelve o'clock. You can go out at half-past eleven."

"Certainly, Monsieur, your study is ready." Study—why did Bressac have a study? Why, because every self-respecting man has a private den, where he is supposed to transact business, even though he has none. It is one of the details of Parisian life that is unescapable.

Bressac had his own study, perhaps because he thought it was not good taste for a bachelor to own a drawing-room; looked too pretentious. His study was carefully furnished, in excellent taste, with oak furniture, and tall book-cases, filled with books of philosophy and classical works, a bust of a Moorish woman in bronze, a stand of guns and curios, a saber on the wall, an exquisite etching of a forest

scene by Hobbena, an oil painting by Detaille, and a wonderful autumn scene of Alphonse.

The combined richness and artistic reunion gave the room to his eyes a real pleasure. This was all he had gained by close economy, and he had spent it on the garnishing of his own sanctum.

This morning his thoughts were far from being gay; he sat down at his desk and gazed mechanically at the half-opened windows.

The floor he occupied was a Rez de Chaussée on the Rue Las Cases, a quiet street; and the inhabitants were eminently respectable and well to do; nothing but the roll of private carriages ever disturbed their slumbers. After a long meditation he murmured:

"She is very nice, Mercoeur's wife—nothing vulgar about her. She's no doll of a woman. A woman! Yes, a true woman. And I, Bressac, am nothing but an idiot. Mademoiselle Jeanne Berthout was about as anxious for a title as I covet the rank of Pope."

"And I met her one morning at Mendun, romantically walking in the woods. It was a happy chance. If I had given six months of my valuable time, I could have won her. One month to complete her conquest, and the other five to captivate

her mother, whom we buried so nicely last January. I would be rich and have espoused a delightful girl, and, if she wanted a chateau so badly, I could easily have bought her Mercoeur's, which he sold for a ballet girl. Oh ! Bressac, you are an idiot ! Fool ! which is certainly a strong word to use to one's self ; but in this case it's correct. Fool ! I am more than that."

After a long hour of serious reflection, he added :

" More than a fool, it's true ; but it's never too late to retrace one's steps."

He tried to imagine from what he had already seen, and his intimate knowledge of Mercoeur's habits, how they lived, and what he did to pass away the time. Nothing, he could remember, though Raoul was thirty years old, denoted energy. Horses, duels, women, and wine had been his sole ambition. Stupid enough to go to the war, as his youth would have excused him from being called upon to bear arms.

" Women his ruin, and when he was ruined I led him as a child to the nuptial altar. Now he is as scrupulous as a bourgeois. There is nothing to him. His wife is worth a hundred of such as he. Their house is open to receive me. Mercoeur can't find a cent at present. Why, I never had such a

good chance before. I begin to feel I should like to be really rich, and this woman and her fortune are in my hands."

His valet had gone. Bressac was lying on a lounge before the window, making the plans of his campaign to gain wealth. It was the most difficult to execute that he had ever attempted during his life.

Almost impossible but very tempting, very tempting. He was so wrapped up in his dream that he had not heard a carriage stop at the door.

This carriage could be seen every week with a single occupant who came to see him. She was carefully veiled; so closely indeed that neither Antoine nor the concierge had ever been able to discover who she was. The days she was expected the door was always left ajar.

"Monsieur Jean Marie Bressac."

"Ah, here you are."

"Did you not expect me; you appear astonished."

Quickly the veiled woman crossed the room and pulled down all the shades. "What an infant you are; do you desire to compromise me?"

Bressac remained silent. He thought, "Absurdity of life; when one thinks he has found the right

combination, he forgets one of the most important agents."

The lady, unassisted, took off her long cloak and veil.

Though she looked rather cross, Bressac smiled; she was still a fine-looking woman, and to visit her lover she had taken extra pains with her usual elegant toilet.

Bressac walked over to her and kissed her cheek. "Breakfast is ready, my dear, will you take my arm?"

"We have plenty of time for breakfast. I can spend the day with you."

A pair of precious adventurers, both ambitious players, taking delight in fishing in dirty water.

They had lost all passions, all desires, and distrusting humanity whenever they themselves had any interest. With even these feelings Gaetana had cast her love, the expiring flame of a middle-aged woman, at Bressac's feet. She was jealous and watchful, knowing how intense her love was and feeling that his was actuated almost by personal gain.

Their liaison was a profound secret unknown except to themselves.

It had commenced through a slight service rendered by her one evening at a ball given by a well-

known duchess. Gaetana whispered to Bressac as he was bowing to her :

"That insignificant little St. Leon has over ten thousand francs on his person ; nothing would give me more pleasure than to have him gamble it away. Can't you assist him to lose it?"

Bressac maneuvered around St. Leon and brought him cleverly to suggest a game.

"Let's play a game of écarté, Bressac, before my cotillon commences !"

St. Leon lost nine thousand of his ten. In leaving the ball-room Bressac offered Gaetana his arm, to escort her to her carriage. She offered him a seat. While seated next to her the perfume and warmth of her body almost intoxicated him ; he kissed her, and she returned it passionately. She was his at the first kiss. He spoke, after a moment's silence :

"I won,—well, we will divide the spoils."

Without hesitation she accepted.

On entering his own home, the Gascon was alarmed at his temerity, and thought to himself, "Is it possible that I am captured?"

Then he added a quotation. He liked quotations, they showed he was educated. *Nous faisons a nous deux un assemblage infâme.*

Little by little they became more intimate, and revealed to each other the secrets of their hitherto unscrupulous existence.

Bressac, at once grasping the situation and the entanglement that he had contracted with Gaetana, now saw how futile were his plans of the morning, and at once abandoned the idea.

"Have you paid your note?" asked Gaetana, as they were seating themselves at the table.

"Yes."

"What amiable friend served for banker?"

"The Marquis d'Essaumes and General Moustil, at Raoul de Mercoeur's reception."

"Ah; then you have seen that worthy, have you? Perhaps it's to your visit that I owe my invitation to their receptions on Thursdays. They must be quite patriarchal; such a united family."

"More than partiarchal, bourgeois; and so commonplace and vulgar that my friend Raoul is apt to forget he is a gentleman, and not keep his promise."

"Why should he, more than another?"

"If you had only given me his note and promise the day after the funeral we should have been paid long ago."

"Paid long ago! that we could be kicked from

the door like any other satisfied creditor. This is my idea of your friend Mercoeur. Pleasant for us to hear, that the Mercoeurs would no longer receive the Baroness San Rinazzi."

"Great satisfaction, when one is not paid."

"No, no; the credit we give is necessary to maintain our position. They must receive us for two, three, perhaps five years, sociably, until we are paid. And as we shall in that time become almost one of the family they cannot, without giving scandal, drop us."

"Well calculated as far as it goes, but they might not care, even after five years, if they dropped us."

"How could they afford to? It seems to me when a gentleman sells himself—a sale where there was as much love as barter. Yes, love; have you read my friend Raoul's character! Can't you see he is madly in love with his wife; loves her as dearly as though he was only a lawyer's clerk. Can't you see he will not ask her for her signature, for fear of dishonoring himself in her eyes? Yes, yes, dishonoring himself. He has these vulgar prejudices still. Don't you know they have only a million left, and it's only with money that he earns himself that Mercoeur will pay us? Haven't you been clever enough to see all this?"

"Certainly I have had a presentiment that way and I am pleased that you are of the same opinion. It helps me wonderfully in a project I have in view. I want a close hold over the Count of Mercoeur so that I can use him and his name and that of his family."

"Idle dreams; not practical."

"You seem very anxious to get the money. Is it that you want to buy a country villa and become a hermit? Do you want to discontinue our relations?"

Bressac shrugged his shoulders and replied roughly:

"I am tired of living from hand to mouth. Fortune might go against me one day, the brilliancy of my life might die out if marked cards were found on me, and still I have to use such base means for procuring the necessary funds to live and keep up my present style and house. But if I had a capital of three hundred thousand francs in my hands to manipulate, as we know how, it would soon become a million."

"Have you spoken to Raoul?"

"We had a highly dramatic interview. He has promised on his honor as a gentleman to pay us in September."

"Very imprudent. And if in September he can't pay, he is still a gentleman in spite of all you say. I can't believe otherwise. That very honor of a gentleman will be our ruin, as he will kill himself, and we lose our only guarantee. This is what your friend is apt to do."

During the whole day Bressac could not drive Gaetana's words from his mind, "His honor as a gentleman would force him to commit suicide if he could not pay." Was not this a solution to the calculation he had made that morning?

He allowed himself to remain passive to all Gaetana's endearments.

"I dare say it's foolish on my part to try and get rid of the old love for a new, especially where the old has in her power my complete ruin, and in her jealousy would never hesitate to do it—to run after a young woman who would be very indignant at my presumption if I ever mentioned a word of love. But, that is——"

And already he wished the time would fly, so that he could call on Jeanne, as he would not wait until Thursday when she would be surrounded with friends, and where Gaetana doubtless would keep a watchful eye on him.

XI.

WHENEVER Bressac wanted to think out a project he would leave Paris, whose feverish unquiet prevented his cool, deliberate plans. The Bois was one of his favorite walks—not the fashionable portion of it where the gay world could be found riding and driving, but the quiet, retired walks, almost complete solitude, where he felt rested and could throw himself at the foot of some tree on the green grass and meditate.

While seated under the tree, lost in thought, he saw the forms of two women before his eyes, Gaetana's, with her well-bred air and perfectly dressed, and her wonderful complexion; and Jeanne's, fresh and healthy. He had been fascinated with her the night previous; her quick, abrupt way of speaking had taken his fancy.

"Do I expect to mix love in my plans? Nice campaign, by my faith, to try and be third fiddle in a family in opposition to Gaetana's predictions."

It was not sentimental love that occupied his adventurous mind, but a brutish desire, which was

quite in keeping with his inner life. The days seemed interminable. Would they never pass? Paris could offer him no new attraction. First nights, races, receptions, *petit soupers*—they all bored him. He was bored with Gaetana, tired of cards,—always the same,—tired of his usual routine, and constantly meeting the same people.

It seemed nothing strange to him that at this moment Jeanne's shadow fell on the path near him.

"She is charming," he thought; "charming." She was walking with the nurse, who carried a much beribboned baby. Raoul had not been able to accompany them, as to-day he was hunting the money for Gaetana and Bressac. The child was asleep, and Jeanne was watching the rosebud face, which to her was a reproduction of her adored Raoul's.

At the moment while passing in front of Bressac, the nurse slipped and the baby almost fell. Bressac caught the child and held it while the nurse regained her footing.

"I thank you, Monsieur," said Jeanne. She scarcely looked at the man; her whole attention was riveted on the child, whose slumber had not been broken. Bressac replied:

"I thank my good fortune that brought me to the Bois to-day."

Jeanne slightly bowed as she was arranging the baby's cloak. Bressac walked by her side, trying to find some word that would open a conversation, something that she would have to answer.

Jeanne felt very uneasy. She had again seen the lines in Raoul's forehead, this mark of sorrow which had darkened their lives once before. What misfortune had befallen him? Unfortunate business transactions. Raoul had told her the night before that Bressac had come on business; perhaps he was going to speak to her about it. But no. The Gascon spoke about family affairs, the baby, and ordinary topics of conversation, and Jeanne began to understand why he was so much sought after in the salons. There was not a grain of maliciousness in his talk; he recalled laughingly to her mind their first meeting under the trees at Meudon one early June morning.

"It's my fortune always to meet you in the woods; only the first time I must have frightened you, as you fled."

It was so, she had run away, frightened at something she could not understand. Since then, however, her first impressions had been effaced. She

was grateful to Bressac for his sympathy at her mother's funeral. Yesterday also he had been so agreeable as to charm all her other guests; as though he guessed it was not pleasant to them both to have to keep up a general conversation, he had cleverly come to their aid. And his generosity toward the poor, perhaps too ostensible. The Marquise L'Essaumes had pronounced him charming. Ought she not to make her home pleasant so that Raoul would never want to leave it? Ought she not to like her husband's friends? And she knew that Bressac was the oldest he had. Raoul had told her they were at college together, and college friends are usually the most sincere; and besides, last evening Bressac had been fascinated with her conversation; he had tried to study her character, to divine her weakest points. A woman of her type could not lie, and in a little time her words would inform him thoroughly regarding her feelings. No coquetry in her, a gentle smile on her lips. "The same smile for every thing," Bressac said.

"Don't you know, Madame, that Raoul deserves a good scolding for leaving you alone?"

"Monsieur de Mercoeur has his business to attend to, Monsieur."

The smile left Jeanne's lip as she said this, but it quickly returned at the sight of her child, just awakened. Bressac, who had never played with a child in his life, tried to render his voice caressing to speak to the little one.

"How pleasant it must be to have a child of one's very own. Is it not so, Madame?"

They had been talking together, though the conversation was all on his side. Jeanne, desirous of creating sympathy for her husband and his family, disarmed by his character of the previous evening, and thinking that perhaps after the gay dinner of the night before that the evening would appear dull to Raoul, said to Bressac, when leaving:

"If you have no other engagement, Monsieur Bressac, come and take dinner with us; my husband will be charmed, I am sure."

On her return home she said to Raoul:

"I have invited Monsieur Bressac to dinner."

Raoul paled, and in a trembling voice said:

"You have then seen him?"

"Yes, I went for a walk with nurse and baby, and we met M. Bressac on one of the by-paths. We had a long talk. Are you angry?"

"I angry? No, Jeanne, indeed no; only I should infinitely have preferred spending the even-

ing alone with you. I have no anxiety to invite others to participate in our happiness."

"You say that, Raoul, to-day; to-morrow you may say otherwise. A man and husband who desires no other company than his wife and child is a curiosity. I don't want you to be that. Have we not decided that we will entertain our friends? Besides, your cousins ought to come."

Raoul made no reply.

"I have, then, done wrong in inviting Monsieur Bressac," said Jeanne. "If so, I shall believe you are not good friends. What is it?"

"No, I have not quarreled with him."

"Why do you look so cross, then. You ought to confide in me."

"Jeanne, Jeanne, you are trying to make mountains out of a grain of sand."

She felt that there was a false ring in Raoul's voice. He was not happy as they had been. Jeanne saw he tried to force a laugh and drive the frown from his forehead. She thought he was ready to cry.

"Raoul, my husband, are there some people who come here that you don't like?"

"No, my wife, you have a very vivid imagination and have such strange ideas."

Jeanne was sure that there was some secret. What secret? Oh! how she would like to fathom it, and she continued:

"Raoul, do you like to have Mme. San Rinazzi or not; or is it the Duchess of Roquemont that you dislike?"

"Really, Jeanne, you want to know more than I do myself."

She was silenced but not satisfied, and hurt at his apparent silence and want of confidence in her. In her anxiety about him she did not notice that Bressac's visits were becoming more frequent than their acquaintanceship would warrant, and on her reception days he was always near her.

Gaetana remarked it all, and, without troubling herself to inquire the reason, as her innate vanity led her to believe that Bressac was comparing her superior charm to that of the *petite bourgeoise*, and in speaking to her friend one evening (they had just left the Mercoeurs, and as she was so very circumspect she had left fully half an hour before he did, but they met on the next block):

"Honestly now," said she, "would you not rather offer your arm to the Countess of Mercoeur in preference to the Baroness San Rinazzi?"

"Are you bereft of your reason, my love?"

"*Mon cher*, all the guests noticed how attentive you were to your hostess."

"If the guests remarked it, they must have been very vulgar people. All the gentlemen ought to be attentive to the lady of the house where they are visiting; it's almost the elementary part of politeness."

"Is it then through elementary politeness that you go there every day to inquire about her health, or follow her to the Bois, and walk with her on secluded paths? Sigh when you offer her a cup of tea? My friend, if I were in Raoul's place."

Bressac interrupted her, saying:

"Would you be jealous?"

"Perhaps."

He, the adventurer, burst out laughing—a harsh, dry laugh.

"Don't you know I am looking after our commission?"

Gaetana laughed, too; all her suppositions had vanished.

The last Thursday in July Jeanne had been awaiting Raoul. The usual dinner hour had long passed, and she was getting fidgety at his unusual tardiness. In going out he had appeared in good spirits, almost too gay; his last words were:

"To-day I expect to close a business transaction of considerable importance. The profits will be large, without risking much capital."

Jeanne only said:

"Be prudent."

The day had gone, no Raoul.

Jeanne had seen the baby put to bed; now she was fixing a bouquet of flowers on the tea table in the salon.

"Why does not Raoul come back; he knows it's our last reception!" Not a word. Why had he been talking of hoping to make a considerable profit for the past few days without consulting her?

She had been brought up commercially, and knew a great deal more of business than he did. She decided she would ask him frankly what business he was in. If it was necessary to sacrifice part of her fortune to recover their former happiness, she would gladly do so. She has had enough of this separation day after day, and her husband's restless nights; he seemed never to rest.

The evening was growing late; no guests had fortunately yet arrived. The silence of the salon was only disturbed by the rumbling of carriages and the cry of the newspaper boys crying an extra. "A great crisis," they said.

She must get a paper, perhaps some accident had happened to Raoul. She hastily opened a window and hailed a boy, and inquired what the extra was about. An accident.

The boy yelled out :

"A great failure of the Credit d'Unification !"

"A suicide of Monsieur de M——"

Paris will long remember this great failure. The news spread like lightning. In the financial ruin many other houses of long established credit fell. Men were afraid to look each other in the face for fear of finding a creditor. All the stockholders were ruined. The loss was enormous.

Raoul had heard of the suspension on the Bourse.

The Unification of Credit, that prosperous banking concern, where on the following day he was to become a stockholder and invest a portion of his wife's fortune, was now a ruin.

He had spent the day leaning against a post, his head seemed ready to burst; he was unconscious of the flight of time.

Bressac came to hear about the crash, and met him.

"How pale you are. Is all your fortune gone up?"

"No, no, only I had hoped to make up my indebtedness through its agency."

"I only asked, as I had heard you had bought a good deal of its stock."

Bressac left. Raoul began to reflect. He had certainly bought some stock, coaxed to by the Duke de Pry. He had expected to make sixty thousand francs by the transaction. He took out his visiting card and began to calculate. The figures danced before his eyes. His agent told him that his losses exceeded one hundred thousand, and that he would only have three days wherein to pay it.

A new debt of one hundred thousand added to the already existing three hundred thousand. He left the Bourse disconsolate and ashamed of having lied to his wife for the past month. He had contracted this new debt on credit, his broker having furnished the means. He had recklessly gone to him and at the advice of others taken the stock of the now ruined company.

Even Bressac felt badly over the losses his friend had sustained, and inwardly thanked his good fortune at not having been paid by Raoul or else as likely as not he too would have shared the universal ruin.

Dining alone at the club, he was almost frightened at the new checkmate Raoul had received. He guessed correctly from his face that he had been a loser.

"Poor Mercoeur has no luck ; none at all. His reception will be a dull one, no one will be there but perhaps Gaetana. Roquemont is consulting his broker. I guess the Marquis D'Essaumes and General Moustil are doing the same. It's impossible to deny that many worthy people will lose their all."

All around him people had been rudely aroused but he alone had been spared. This idea inflated his pride. Bressac felt proud to think that he alone had escaped the general devastation.

Bringing back his wandering thoughts to their usual current, he thought of Jeanne. Jeanne, sorrowful and angry, asking Raoul for an explanation for the cause of his detention and the look of sorrow his face too well expressed.

Weak characters never know how to excuse themselves.

"Still, he will have to pay a round hundred thousand before the end of the month, his broker told me so. Here is another vexatious delay for me."

Knowing that very few of his and the Mercoeur's friends had escaped unscathed, and that no one would care to visit sociably when such an important event had occurred, he was afraid almost to go. Perhaps, however, Raoul had not returned home yet, and hastily descending the stairs of the club he ordered the porter to call a passing cab, telling the driver to go quickly to the Faubourg St. Honoré.

It was Jeanne herself who opened the door.

"Raoul?"

"Is he not here?"

"I have not seen him since two o'clock."

She invited him to come in the house.

"Do you bring me bad news?"

"No, Madame, none."

They remained silent for a few moments. Bressac felt his superiority. He was better than the little fellow she had married, he thought. The idea intoxicated him.

"Raoul has doubtless been kept by some friends, Madame."

"He ought to have sent me word, and why are all the newsboys crying about a failure; and another thing that troubles me, none of our friends have come as usual."

The uncertainty alarmed Jeanne, a few tears began to roll down her cheek. She felt almost abandoned, at that moment her nerves gave way and she could not restrain her tears. She felt some danger but could not guess whence it would come, and she sat on the lounge looking anxiously toward the door, desirous to hear Raoul's footstep when he should approach. She felt fainting, and mechanically unhooked the top hooks of her waist, quite forgetting that there was a man in the room.

"Leaving me alone all the time; I am so nervous," she cried, "great goodness."

Bressac had clasped her hand, the vanity existent in most men had led him to believe that in her despair she had desired some token of his regard and friendship.

Jeanne instantly arose. Bressac's eyes were fixed on hers, glittering with the light of passion. Poor girl, she imagined from his behavior that he, the intimate friend of her husband, had come to announce some accident which had befallen Raoul. She gasped.

"Speak, sir, tell me quickly. I would like to know, I am brave, do not be afraid!"

He answered her appeal brutally:

"Jeanne, I love you! You are tied to a weak

man, a man not worthy of you, I want to snatch you from him!"

He tried to clasp her round the waist in his impetuous desire to possess her. She suddenly wrenched both her hands away, and Bressac felt a stinging blow on his cheek.

"You villain! You brute!"

Then she stopped, hearing the door open. Raoul was entering, tremblingly, knowing his strength was exhausted and his fight against chance was lost.

The young woman cried:

"Monsieur de Mercoeur, this man has insulted me, throw him out of the house!"

The identical words Jeanne had used came spontaneously to Raoul's lips, he cried, "You villain!"

Jeanne fell back on a chair trembling, and closed her eyes.

She had seen her husband grasp Bressac and shake him, the thought of a duel about her.

Why did Raoul hesitate and not pitch the ruffian out of the window. She heard not a blow. Raoul had let Bressac go. She opened her eyes. It was Bressac who held Raoul by the shoulders and was coolly saying:

"If you dare strike me, your wife shall receive the letter you wrote before marrying her." Then he added :

"Your insults don't amount to a row of pins, a creditor cannot fight with his debtor, you must pay before."

Raoul stood still. He regretted he had not drowned himself in the Seine. Any other day he would have killed his tormentor, but to-day he had not the courage.

Better, indeed, had not Jeanne heard a word, as the revelation of his secret, after all she had lately passed through, would have killed her.

Bressac went up and wickedly said in a mocking voice :

"*Au revoir*, Madame."

And Bressac left.

After he had gone tears came to Raoul's eyes, and he went over to her, and tried to kneel at her side. He could not, nor did he speak one word, for emotion had benumbed him. Quickly he left the room.

Jeanne sat up straight, paralyzed almost, and for a long time remained motionless. She could not understand what withheld her husband from chastising the man who had so grossly insulted her.

Her husband—a coward.

She rang the bell. Joseph came to take her orders.

"Joseph, it's not likely we shall have any company to-night, but if any one comes, say I am very indisposed, and that I cannot see visitors."

And while talking to Joseph, she saw near the divan where Bressac had been seated some pieces of cardboard. She stooped and picked them up, remembering that while struggling with the villain something had fallen out of his pocket.

They were playing cards.

Joseph, with the respectful familiarity of southern servants, where indeed they are like part of the family, said :

"Will you let me see them, Madame ?"

Unconsciously she handed him the cards. He examined them carefully, and quickly he exclaimed in an angry voice :

"Ah, Madame !"

"What is it ?"

"I always had my doubts—these are—oh, but you do not want to know about such things."

Jeanne was enlightened, but she said :

"Return them to me, Joseph. You love your

parents; well, swear to me by your love of them that no one shall ever hear about this."

"Ah, poor Madame!"

And while the poor wife was leaving the room, rigid, and her tears had ceased to flow, tears ran down the cheeks of the faithful servant.

XII.

JEANNE felt dumfounded.

Stunned almost, her eyes fixed on the back of the chair where Raoul usually sat ; her tears remained unshed. She tried to think, but could not.

She was mortified to think her husband was a coward.

A wretch had insulted her. She had called her husband to defend her, and he had not. For a long time she thought over it, until daylight and sound of the sweeper cleaning the street aroused her from her lethargy.

She wished to believe it was a dream, some horrible nightmare !

How could it be. She was not in bed, but still seated in her boudoir, her favorite room, and she still held in her hands the marked cards that had fallen from Bressac's pocket.

Raoul a coward ! How could he be when his record during the war credited him with a perilous bravery, and he had often fought duels. No, no, why had he trembled before Bressac ?

Bressac, the liar and gambler, hypocrite, card swindler, a meanest kind of a thief! And yet this scoundrel was his oldest friend, college chum.

She went into their bedroom, thinking perhaps to find Raoul; but the room was empty. The very solitude of the room caused her anguish, and made her remember her girlhood.

"Father, oh, father, where are you?"

The remembrance of her beloved parent brought tears to her eyes, and she wept, murmuring as she pictured in her mind the factory and his cheery office, where she first learned to read at his side.

"Poor father, I have almost forgotten you, so wrapt up was I in my husband."

Quickly she drew her hand across her eyes, ashamed almost and indignant with herself.

"What kind of society do I frequent?" And there defiled before her eyes the Roquemonts, the baroness, and Captain Lira. Who were those people? She had always disliked them and despised their company. Her instinctive presentiments had been correct.

"It's mortifying to have been a puppet in the hands of such society, surrounded by them as I have been. Wretches, I hate them all!"

In vain she looked to find truth and ease her mind.

One thing certain, she had married a ruined gentleman, and this gentleman had married her for gain. His love was not genuine.

Raoul had never loved her. His kisses and honeyed words were lies. Their happy life at Bellevue was a fraud, all false.

"No, no, Raoul did not love her, she was certain. But if it were possible that he did not. She would rather not believe it, it would be too cruel for her who loved him so. Why, willingly she would lay down her life for his."

Why had Bressac become so intimate?

Bressac and Gaetana were lovers, rumor said, yet no one could affirm it. What villainous scheme had made Bressac pretend to love her? She knew it was not true love, yet she remembered she had trembled when he approached her, the villain. She had trembled because his eyes had such a strange light and because his hand that had clasped hers was burning with fever of desire and brutal passion.

This apparent infatuation on the part of Bressac she could not understand. But it had happened, so that was all to be said about it.

She thought of the situation and she pondered over a thousand and one details that could have occurred to destroy her happiness and explain Raoul's cowardice. She instinctively felt it was only sham cowardice. She thought suddenly, "some secret!"

"A secret, a bond between these men. College friends, then gay bachelors, both petted darlings of society, Bressac had been equally well received as Raoul, though he had no income, and her husband had spent his. What had they lived on?"

Little by little the youthful look left her face and her features became hard and strained. It was no longer the face of a joyous girl and wife. Now she felt alone, an orphan, and as the mother of Raoul's child it behooved her to look the matter squarely in the face with courage.

Naturally she was angry and indignant, but her spirit felt sore, the heart would hurt her worst. Raoul, Bressac's friend, had perhaps lived as he did,—by play.

"Merciful God, have pity! Oh, not that; I would rather see him dead!"

She had almost a vision; her husband appeared holding marked cards in his hand.

"It's not possible that Raoul, my beloved, has ever committed such an infamous thing as cheating at cards. I am crazy to think of it,—Still!"

This idea had taken root. She thought, "This is then the bond that unites them, and that villain holds perhaps some proof against Raoul that he has."

Her lips refused to utter "cheated."

The thought that they must separate gave her a moment's peace. She could easily obtain a limited divorce. If the Courts would not grant it she would live apart, as a woman has no right to demean herself by living with a man who can't protect her honor.

The scandal and the newspapers would glory in the news and revel in the thought of having brought her name down into the gutter of every-day gossip.

"My name—it's not mine, it's my husband's. Mine is Jeanne Berthout, my dear father's name. But my son, my son will have to bear his father's name and title one day."

"Jean, my child, I ought to think of your happiness and welfare before my own. I forgot all about you in my selfishness."

Quickly she ran into the adjoining room, where the baby slept with his nurse.

"You will console me, my darling."

Before the door she hesitated a moment; the child would no doubt be fast asleep. She must not wake him, so she opened the door softly.

When she entered the room a surprise awaited her; a very joyful one, however, and for a few moments almost made her forget her errand.

Close by the bed, with one hand holding the child's, sat her husband, sobbing, with his head buried in the pillow. He did not hear his wife enter.

His sobs and the nurse's loud breathing alone could be heard.

Raoul all at once felt his wife's hand on his shoulder.

"Jeanne!"

As on the previous evening he could say nothing else, only he let the baby's hand go and moved his chair farther from the bed so as to make way for the mother to see her child.

They looked at each other a minute, but not a word of reproach on either side.

It's certainly a fact that Raoul would have infinitely preferred an explosion of anger, not the stony gaze that his wife bestowed on him.

His wife treated him as a stranger because he had acted like a coward in her presence, and because he, a gentleman, had not had the courage to vindicate her, his wife, though she was the daughter of a mechanic. He was ashamed before this woman, and felt so humble before her glance that he dared not break the silence; he was awaiting her sentence to condemn him into exile. He was no longer the head of the house.

The silence became unsupportable, and he rose from his chair and said:

"You look weary. Go and lie down."

Another long silence followed these words, which were spoken in a trembling voice.

Then Jeanne coolly said, "I will rest in my child's room, for the future of my existence belongs to him alone."

This was the decision she had arrived at while standing by the slumbering child's bed. She was afraid of a legal separation, a scandal; afraid of the solitary life of a woman; afraid one day to have to say to her son that his father, the Count of Mercoeur, was a scamp and coward.

Though very indignant, still her mother-heart had been touched by the sight of her husband sobbing at his child's side. She had thought

that she alone had the right to bring the child up.

"You can have our room, Monsieur de Mercoeur; I will occupy this one."

Raoul immediately walked toward the door, when a cry escaped Jeanne's lips:

"Raoul!"

He came back to her side at once, but all kind feeling had left Jeanne's face. She was very pale, and had a look as though she would ask for an explanation; it was not possible that their mutual happiness must come to such an abrupt conclusion.

Raoul understood all she would say, but the weakness of his character, bruised as he now felt, rendered it impossible for him to speak first. Very soon he turned to leave the room.

So his life was ended.

He did not dare stay in their room, the room where some of the happiest hours of his life had been passed; he went to the smoking-room, the only room in the house he felt he had a right to be, because all the furniture in it had come from his bachelor rooms.

"What's the good of struggling now?" he said. "Why should I strive and get that money, misfortune pursues me so persistently. Then, again, that

loss to-day. Well, it's all over. I had nothing to pay that hundred thousand francs. I need only say the word to Jeanne. But my conduct before her yesterday. Ah! coward! coward! I ought to have killed that fellow. But I am not an assassin. And Bressac would have informed Jeanne of the whole transaction. I am in his clutches; he can order, I must obey. With the secret he possesses he can force me to commit almost anything, however infamous. Infamy, did I not commit it when I married the way I did? And even yesterday I had not the force to protect my insulted wife; I, a gentleman. I am crazy!"

"No, I was prudent; I would rather have my wife think me a coward than know the ignominious way I prepared to marry her. Our love—that's ended; but if our love is all over, what am I doing here?"

He brusquely arose and took down a pistol that was hanging over the mantle-piece.

"Self-destruction is the acme of cowardice, but as I am a coward anyway I have the right to blow my brains out."

He calmly put the cartridges in the breech. "My dear friend of 1870, I am still able to load you."

Suddenly his pistol was snatched from his hand, Jeanne stood by his side ; a light of joy lit up her beautiful eyes.

"You are not a coward, darling ; you were going to kill yourself ! "

Raoul sadly replied :

"Why did you prevent me ? It's better that I should die, as our happiness is over."

"Listen, Raoul. Since yesterday I have been waiting and listening. I want to hear from you a word explaining your conduct. You never were afraid, were you ! Then why did you not throw that scoundrel downstairs and break his neck ? Speak, I beseech you ; tell me the secret that binds you to that man ? Tell me if he ever saved your life ? Tell me that there is some honorable excuse for your cowardice of yesterday ! Raoul, you never did anything wicked. What ! are you afraid to tell me ? I, who have no one but you ; yes, you and our son ; I will not give you up ! Here, by our child's crib, swear to me that the bond that ties you to Bressac is only a youthful indiscretion. We can forget that together. I beg of you to tell me that it's nothing that has occurred since you have known me. Can't you speak ? "

Raoul slowly said :

"Jeanne, there are events sometimes in men's lives that are secrets, dreadful secrets, as you have guessed. I cannot tell you this one, because I love you and because I will not sully our love."

Jeanne put her hand in her bosom and drew out the marked cards.

"And if I have guessed this secret? If chance has been kind enough to furnish the proof."

Raoul trembled.

"Here," cried Jeanne, "I know your secret. Do you see these cards that Bressac had in his pocket? I did not see anything wrong with them, but Joseph says they are marked."

Raoul cried in an indignant voice:

"Stop, Jeanne! This is not my secret. I swear to you by our child's love, by my life, it's not this!"

Jeanne mutely asked herself, "What could be worse than playing with marked cards? Her generous instincts faded; the mouth that was ready almost to pardon became rigid when Raoul, with his eyes cast down, said:

"There are crimes not recognized by the law; crimes which modern society excuses. I was guilty of one of these infamous actions, and you were the innocent object. You alone have the right to ask an accounting; that is why I cannot tell you."

Jeanne's face hardened and she withdrew her hand, which she had given her husband. It was by seeing her so indulgent toward him that Raoul was almost ready to ask her pardon and avow his fault. Now he did not dare speak.

"You see, Madame, it would be better to let me die."

"Die! You have not the right."

Jeanne almost guessed the truth. Raoul was guilty toward her, her alone. Her loyalty and honesty had to be appeased, but her love for him would prevent her from wishing his death. What she had witnessed on the previous evening had almost shattered her faith in him; still, woman-like, she loved him, even though he was guilty of what she did not dare imagine. Still, her love could survive any indiscretion if he would only tell her and vow amendment for the future, and so she would hope against hope.

"No, Raoul, you have not the right to kill yourself, because you must help to bring up our child."

"You can do that better than I, Jeanne."

"A Mercoeur must bring up a Mercoeur."

"But you bear the name more worthily than I do, Madame."

"I will never bear it, Monsieur, if you are unworthy to carry it."

"So, knowing my unworthiness, will you consent to live under the same roof with me?"

"Under the same roof, yes. With you, no! Our child has the right to ask us to conceal our domestic troubles and present to the world an appearance of perfect harmony. We alone will know otherwise."

"That is impossible, Madame; to ask me to live like a stranger to my own wife."

"Do you desire me to explain more fully, Monsieur? I think that when disgrace has separated man and wife, they ought to consider their lives as ended. They must obliterate themselves completely, and only live for their offspring. Of us three, the only one who has any right to dictate terms is the Viscount de Mercoeur. And I swear to you that if you kill yourself, I will tell your son that his father was an infamous scoundrel!"

"Jeanne, Jeanne, you won't do that?"

"I never lie, Monsieur."

"Very well, I consent."

"If you wish it we will leave Paris."

"Leave Paris; where will you go?"

"Have you forgotten that Mercoeur belongs to us?"

Mercoeur, the home of his ancestors. The house where he was born, and where the memory of his parent's loyalty still lived.

"Yes, yes, let's go there."

His native place was like a plank cast to a drowning man. There was a chance yet left him. In the excitement of Parisian life the thought of his friends there had been forgotten. Doubtless, there he would be able to borrow the money he needed, and after the debt was paid he could kill himself.

It was a sublime thought that had come to his wife.

Jeanne felt instinctively that, though a grievous fault had been committed by her husband, still he was an honest man.

Raoul, young and giddy, had lived a fast life, and doubtless had allowed himself to be inveigled into some dishonorable scheme; something that she could not be told; he was going to punish the misstep by a pistol shot. Jeanne did not want to lose her husband.

"He is mine, I have him; no one else has the right to take him from me."

She loved him and had always done so since

they first met. Perhaps, woman-like, she even loved him more now, as he was at her mercy ; he had not defended her honor, but he was willing to die for dear love's sake. Her love for him was that of a fond mother, who always clings to the prodigal child.

He was guilty. He had acknowledged it. Guilty before her. How could she continue to esteem a man whom she knew was — all she asked was that he would forget the past and be a good husband and father to their child for the future.

After all, how could he, the valiant soldier and well-bred gentleman, who was willing to shed his blood for atonement, be guilty of a criminal action ?

No, the others were the guilty ones ; he had been their unconscious accomplice, and it was her duty as a wife to unloosen these miserable fetters.

To return to Mercoeur. She was so glad to take him from Paris and the giddy whirlpool that sought to engulf them.

"Then the associations at Mercoeur will help him toward oblivion, and he is my husband. I won't give him up."

This idea dominated over all others, and her

face became radiant with love and the trusting devotion of a loving wife, and she smiled as she said to herself:

"There, I can, if necessary, regenerate him. I can control his actions there. My love, my Raoul, I will save you—I, your wife."

XIII.

PARIS awoke to see a sorrowful day. The work-people asked each other, "Have you read the papers?"

Long columns in all the dailies gave full particulars of the failure, which was dominated under the title of "Le Krach."

After the first moment of stupor, the long list of names whose fortunes had been swamped, almost terrified the shop-keepers; but for the working people it was almost a *fête*.

"Glad enough for those aristocrats," said they; "it will teach them a lesson."

Jeanne and Raoul were seated at the breakfast table, silent; but determined to carry on the outward appearance before the servants. Before them loomed a life of misery; though Jeanne was confident that the trip to Mercoeur would cause her husband to confess his fault to her. Raoul wished his life was ended, only he wished to see his aunt and confide in her, and ask her to save his honor; then could he terminate his wretched existence with a shot.

Jeanne would think of him kindly when he was dead, and would forget that he had been guilty toward her.

This was his last desire.

As they had both slept after the discussion of the previous night, it was late when they had breakfast, and only now were they reading their letters. Lucky chance had sent Jeanne a letter from Mademoiselle de Lansac, full of reproaches at their neglect.

"The baby was nearly four months old and she had never seen him."

Raoul paid no attention to his aunt's letter, but appeared highly interested in one he had just opened. So as not to interrupt him, Jeanne mechanically opened a paper, and the first line that caught her eye was the article describing the ruin caused by the failure, and she saw almost at the top the following notice:

"We noticed leaning against the portico of the Bourse the Count de M——, who, when his own finances were at low ebb, married the only daughter and heiress of a rich manufacturer, whose fortune, since he has handled it, will fast follow his own. However, it's lucky for his creditors that the fortune of his wife will enable him to liquidate his losses."

This notice struck Jeanne like a revelation. Here was the reason.

She showed Raoul the paper and anxiously asked if this explained his conduct. Would he say, "This, dear, was the direct cause of my cowardice and what I called explaining——" Explain. But no, Raoul read the notice and said:

"I had almost forgotten this. This paper and a letter from my broker now recall it to my mind. I hope you will forgive me, Jeanne. Hoping in my usual luck, I speculated in an enterprise that all my friends advised me to. I have been unfortunate enough to lose."

"How much?"

"My broker says about a hundred thousand francs."

He spoke the above words simply, knowing beforehand what Jeanne would say.

"He must be paid immediately."

And she said it without a word of reproach, and went over to her desk to sign the necessary documents that would allow Raoul to dispose of part of her capital to pay this debt. She was so joyful at the prospect of going south.

Paris! Paris! The city where she was born and bred disgusted her. She tried hard to remem-

ber her father and his factory, and the pleasantness of her childhood, but somehow they were partially effaced in her present sorrow. The Paris of her youth had vanished, and, like a mirage spread before her eyes, was the Paris of the now; fast, gay, and worldly. It meant Gaetana and Bressac; social hypocrisy, and again—Bressac.

"Raoul, you must hurry to liquidate your broker's account."

"I will go to-day, Jeanne."

"Please, and I will order the servants to admit no visitors in case they call. I will say we are preparing to go south."

Raoul smiled sadly, at the friendly way Jeanne still consulted him, even now, after their rupture.

"I told you yesterday, Madame, that you are mistress here. All I can do is to fulfill your desires."

Then he left for the Bourse.

Jeanne went to see her son, and kissing him fondly, she whispered:

"It's through you, my darling, and your influence, that your father's future welfare depends."

After having given Joseph strict orders not to admit visitors, she went to her room to arrange about packing.

She had never liked this house, where her moth-

er's taste in gilt and tinsel had been so lavishly displayed.

Jeanne had tried to efface the gew-gaws of modern upholstery. While emptying wardrobes and closets of their contents preparatory to putting them in their trunks, which Joseph had just brought down from the garret, she turned suddenly to him and asked :

"Is Mercoeur a large place ?"

Joseph looked at her, astonished at this unusual question.

"Has not Monsieur told you?" Jeanne asked.

"No, Madame ; no, no, what?"

"Why, we are going to Mercoeur."

"Going! Mercoeur! Livone! Ah, Madame! Madame!"

This faithful follower was so enraptured at the thought of revisiting his beloved village, that he gave a fairy-like description of its fields and pastures, vineyards and woods, and the great bell at Livone, which rang the hours, halves, and quarters, and the old church, which was so old that it was propped up by neighboring houses. And the market place, where the fairs were held, was five times larger than the Place Carrousel in Paris.

"Ah! Madame! It is a wise step you are

taking in making this visit. And do you know that my parents' vineyard is right next to the chateau?"

He communicated his enthusiasm to Jeanne. The young woman fancied herself already in the chateau, in the old picture gallery, which was doubtless dilapidated and dusty, but she hoped soon to infuse new life into the old home.

"Besides, there I shall have my Raoul to myself. Ah, Paris! Paris!"

Then her isolation in Paris frightened her, Parisian as she was; while at Livone she could always rely on the co-operation and counsel of Mademoiselle de Lansac. The memory of the old lady's first words came back vividly to her mind:

"Kiss me, little one, and call me aunt."

To leave Paris was the only idea at present before her. She was nervously waiting for Raoul's return, to know the hour and day that they were going to leave Paris. In the midst of these thoughts and hopes whereby she was trying to console herself, she heard a voice at the door of her apartments, a voice indeed which sent a cold tremor through her.

Joseph was insisting, "Monsieur is out as I told you. Madame will receive no one."

"I will come in, and see either monsieur or madame!"

"But, sir, I have already told you, you can see neither of them."

Joseph was roughly pushed aside by the visitant.

Bressac, the scoundrel, dared then to return.

This audacity had been caused by a visit from Gaetana, who also had lost considerably on the Bourse. But he had decided to come, taking all chances, and knowing that Raoul would have to go out to pay his broker, he had waited in the embrasure of a neighboring doorway until he had seen him go out. Bressac thought that he was anxious to terminate this affair, and it was cowardly to his mind to hesitate.

In the baseness of his own soul the pride of manhood still remained. Insulted! insulted! and by a woman, and a "bourgeoise" at that, who he could bring on her knees if he spoke the word.

Well, certainly, he had shown her that her husband was formed of common clay; a man who could not resent an insult and kill the perpetrator. His mind must be unbalanced, perhaps this financial crisis had something to do with it.

"I am not sure that he did not act wisely, for if

he had struck me instead of killing me, I should have told his wife. There is time enough to inform him. My plan is superb, there is nothing to show that I have been mixed up in the scandal, the baroness alone must bear the brunt of it. And she is the one who still holds Mercoeur's note. *Tant pis!* I have the upper hand. This transaction made public will certainly cause a separation, also a lawsuit."

"The young woman, after having said mockingly to my face, 'Send him away,' would let me prove her friend."

But notwithstanding his habitual confidence in himself, Bressac felt a fear, a timidity.

"It is because these children of the people, the 'bourgeoise,' have a great energy! If she forces Mercoeur to fight. If Mercoeur has advanced to others that his wife has decided to pay? Bah, bah!" ejaculated Bressac, "Mercoeur is a first-rate hand with his sword, and as brave in the field as he is indolent in his daily life. Bah, bah! again. It's not that I am afraid, but to get one's self pinked and hurt for such a trifle indeed! It would be absurd, the act of a fool! Come on then, I say. Shall I carry the hammer in hand? Mercoeur has confessed nothing at all. Have men

of his stamp any character? I am the strongest. I must play my cards well."

He had seen Raoul starting for the Bourse, and almost stupefied in feeling, and murmuring to himself: "Who knows? We may perhaps be welcome. We may. So much the worse for Gaetana."

Jeanne, hearing this noise, went bravely to the door.

"Let him in, Joseph, I had forgotten to tell you that I expected this gentleman, but to everyone else my doors are shut. Come, then, sir,"

She directed the way to the drawing-room, followed by Bressac, who had already lost some of his cool audacity before the calm, composed manner of the young wife.

Jeanne stood upright, and looked coldly on the miserable being who had insulted her on the previous evening. Her first thoughts were to avoid any scandalous, venomous words before her servants. Meanwhile she found herself face to face with the man who had slandered her husband, with the man who knew Raoul's terrible secret.

She trembled that this secret should be divulged. She ought not, she would not pretend to know it.

"What do you wish, sir?"

"To see you and to speak to you, Madame."

"I thought after the manner you were turned away from here, you would not dare return."

"You deceive yourself, Madame, for I was not driven away. I left with my head held high, and your husband——"

"Be silent, sir. A miserable thing like you has not the right even to pronounce the name of Monsieur de Mercoeur."

"Ah, has he then explained his reasons?"

"The Count de Mercoeur has no explanations to give to the Countess de Mercoeur. He is master of himself, and is free to act as he pleases. No one has the right to doubt his courage or honesty."

"Not even Madame, when Monsieur has not the courage to fight?"

"Sir, sir!"

"Ah, Madame! Can a woman like you blind herself in this matter? Also, does the man who ought to protect you, allow you to be insulted? And you pardon, you forgive him, and defend him? It is very grand, very noble of you, indeed."

"I am astonished that such as you can judge what is good and noble."

Bressac trembled, Jeanne knew then. No, she

would not have defended Raoul in this manner if her husband had confessed.

Then he began again.

"You are deceived, Madame, your generosity is abused. You are made to think that this is only a loss of money. Ah, well, I will tell you the motives which prevent the Count de Mercoeur from demanding of me satisfaction of an injury. Your husband——"

Jeanne felt a thrill of great indignation, and haughtily cutting short the words of this wretch she said :

"I do not want to know the motives which prevent Monsieur de Mercoeur from asking redress from Monsieur Bressac. The Count de Mercoeur is his own best judge. But I tell you, yes *I* can, the reasons which prevent Monsieur de Mercoeur from giving to Monsieur Bressac the honor of fighting him in a duel."

She then took out of her bosom the marked cards, and throwing them to Bressac, said : "Hold sir, these cards, you will want to make your game to-night, for your world ; your society."

And, standing straight before him, she, in extending her hand, meaningly showed him the door. Bressac turned livid.

He remembered that the previous night he had lost his cards, and did not remember how. If he knew Mercoeur's secret, now Jeanne knew his. True, she had no proofs, nothing showed that these cards were his, but she could denounce him to the world. He was so afraid, that he ran out ashamed.

Jeanne called Joseph, and desired him to forget that Bressac had even called.

"Never a word to any one, you hear me, never."

"I promise you, Madame."

Jeanne was quieted now. She felt in her woman's pride an immense and happy satisfaction that she could revenge herself, and out of her love for Raoul that she could show Bressac that her husband had sufficiently strong motives for treating with contempt any injury coming from such as he was. Now again the idea of leaving had taken her fancy, and when she heard the names of Mercoeur, Livone, and Aunt de Lansac, her ears were burning with pleasure.

Bressac ran rapidly to the Bourse in a great rage, hoping to encounter Mercoeur, and to strike him publicly. He made inquiries, found that Mercoeur had been there already, settled his losses very easily, and had left at once.

His broker said to him, "We shall soon regain that."

Mercoeur replied, "You will never see me here again. I leave for the south at once."

Notwithstanding his blind rage, Bressac was too much a Parisian not to observe the overthrow, the despair of all hopes which had seized upon all of them, and also to hear the hard, wicked words hurled on those who were supposed to be the authors of the catastrophe.

"Ah, if we held them!" They then tore off a leaf of a satirical squib in a journal in which one of the minor clerks related his own history. Fortune coming to him little by little, became more encouraging, until one day, when it was all swallowed up suddenly.

They all tried to laugh, and finished up saying, "That is our history, after all."

In the midst of all this misfortune among men of this class, Bressac saw the solemn figures of the clients of the Faubourg, who from force of habit came back to the building, hoping to regain a fortune.

There were also assembled the equipages of many great and high ladies, who could not yet believe in this great crash and ruin.

There was a crowd in the famous restaurant where the brokers between two "baba's" took formerly their clients' orders.

Bressac met Van Dernicht, who in his great trouble had forgotten for two days to dye his mustaches.

"Ah, well, financier, are your pockets touched?"

"Personally, no. Some clients'."

"Ah, I see. These financial circulars dropped into the water for a little time?"

Van Dernicht smiled, his little eyes twinkled.

"Financial circulars? More of them than ever! Listen. Do you know I have already a superb one?"

"So you think humbug is dead?"

The base, sordid soul of Bressac felt for a moment an admiration of one who in the face of the announcement of entire ruin, could already dream of and plan new chances.

Bressac walked on in the Boulevard, impatient for the hour that Gaetana would return home.

"Ah, Gaetana! His hope now."

Had Bressac been really so foolish as to fool himself to pretend he loved the Countess Mercoeur, at the risk of breaking off with his friend Gaetana? Now more than ever he wanted the

baroness's aid to fish in the troubled waters of the world.

But in his heart there raged a furious conflict of feeling against Raoul and Jeanne. Oh! if he had only Raoul's letter in his hands. He would have it at any price, and he hoped to seize it from Gaetana.

"How now? Is it you?" said Gaetana, as soon as she saw Bressac.

"Yes, me. Well, what then?"

"At last. You dare come to see me, Bressac?"

"If you are going, Gaetana, to make reproaches and recriminations, you had better leave them alone. We must talk seriously." Bressac knitted his brows.

"Seriously, be it so, then. But, do you know, I have been obliged to take another partner? For two months I do not know what has come to you; one does not see you, and you say nothing. And certainly it is now a favorable moment to come to the aid of the gilded youth! But your days are taken up with the Countess Mercoeur. Come along my friend, own it, ought I not to be jealous?"

"You know well, Gaetana."

"Oh, I know all that. To watch the commission."

"Well, Gaetana, it is natural of me."

"And you would not be sorry to take any little advantage of her husband? Quite natural, all that is most natural in nature; but you are losing your time, my dear boy, and what is of more consequence, you are losing mine."

Bressac was vexed, his rage against the Mercoeurs increased. He felt himself so mean, so little before the woman who had mocked at him.

Then Gaetana continued: "You return to your friend Gaetana, who you imagine has neither seen nor heard anything. Hold, my boy. You are all imbeciles, ultra foolish, you clever men. The weakest woman can twist you around as easily as if you were children. After having taken simply as a scholar a few lessons in the drinking school, you come back here. It is well. Then you expect a scene. No, it shall be an explanation. You thought you would break away from me, from Gaetana, child that you are. When two beings of our force of character meet in this world, they never part, they fall, they rise again together. You are mine, I am yours. When one of the two wishes to part, he takes a wrong path. And you have taken a wrong road, Bressac, to forget me. You have not been here for ten days. Yesterday,

a day of catastrophe, accidents, when you knew I wanted your advice, also your money, you were gone after the countess. Now, do not tell a lie, for I saw you."

"Well, it was her reception. I thought I should meet you."

"Do not excuse yourself to me, as if you were a timid girl who had lost her first rendezvous. I pity you; be more manly than that, and show your cards openly on the table."

"Gaetana, I came here this morning; I went in the afternoon to the Bourse to see you."

"Ah, yes," said Gaetana; "a scene of some kind at the Mercoeurs, and you want me near. Afterward you left the Mercoeurs' house in a state of mad folly. *I* saw you. I was there; I had come thereabouts for a little information. You see, I must do my own police work, as you no longer help me. I saw you furious, swearing, like an ill-bred man."

"Well, is this all, Gaetana?"

"No, I wish to ask if it was by your excellent advice that the Count de Mercoeur has performed that beautiful trick by which he has lost one hundred thousand francs? One hundred thousand francs, paid to-day, while we have not even

touched a farthing of our three hundred thousand francs. My dear friend," said Gaetana, "the Bourse is nothing more than a vast gambling palace, and gambling debts are paid always in twenty-four hours."

"Have you paid yours, then?"

"What debts are there?"

"Ah, your little differences on the Bourse. You laugh at others, Gaetana; sometimes you are caught."

"Perhaps."

"You play I know, and lose."

"It does not signify to you, as you never come here now."

"What have you lost, then?"

"Sixty thousand," said Gaetana.

Bressac said in reply, "You must be in low water?"

"Oh, no," Gaetana replied. "I have found credit at a loan office or at a banker's."

"A banker? On what recommendation?"

"On the recommendation of a statesman."

"Then you forsake the Faubourg?"

"No, only I condescend, Bressac, to lean my elbow on a public man's arm."

This conversation, in short sentences, annoyed Bressac. He did not care to know how Gaetana had fared in her losses on the Bourse.

He had come to talk of the Mercoeurs, to get hold of Raoul's letter, and hasten the payment of the three hundred thousand francs.

"The devil take your deputy and your banker! You can act well with that, indeed. I have seen at the Mercoeurs' house all preparations for a departure. They are going, flying away. If we do not demand to-day the payment of our three hundred thousand francs——"

"The count," said Gaetana, "has promised payment in September."

"Well, if they are ruined in September?"

"The Mercoeurs have still a million left."

"To wait a long time is a folly. I want, I will have for my part, this sum. Give me Raoul's letter."

"And if this letter, instead of the three hundred thousand francs, was worth a million?"

"Foolery!"

"It is worth a million to-day."

As Gaetana was saying this, the footman brought in a card.

"Bid him enter," said the adventuress. She then showed Bressac the card, who read :

SAINT BLAISE,
Deputy, Livone.

XIV.

"Sir, an embassy which can give us the opinion of Saint Blaise."

These words, pronounced in the Chamber of Deputies by a witty and clever member of the Republican party, one day had run all through the ranks and galleries, until they had arrived at the tribune of the journalists, where the editor of a conservative journal had transformed the words: "Gentlemen, one hundred louis to him who can tell us the opinion of St. B——!"

Making it follow a sweeping remark: "Is it not shocking that it is allowed to speak thus of a man occupying a position in the public offices and stocks?"

Saint Blaise laughed, and turning as his chance the well-known principle, he called out in his friend's hearing, "The public bonds and stocks; why, that is government money."

An excellent man, however, was Saint Blaise,—a tender heart; and, incapable of witnessing a bull fight, he was a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. If he had not,

perhaps, very strong opinions, it was the fault of the republic, which had many politics on hand, but no business. Business was the great point of Saint Blaise. His title of deputy was for him only a sign manual of financiering and commerce. And if the department had not had the good taste to send him to the Palais Bourbon, Saint Blaise would have replied, if he were asked about his profession :

"I am in business."

The number of people in Paris who talk of being in business is prodigious. In vain it is to try and ascertain the nature of the business, if it be finance, commerce, an industry, shop, banks. It is always affairs, business ; this all etiquette knows, and etiquette is of more value in Paris than mechanics. "Make business." But this shows, however, that people have not much money ; because if possessed of money, no one needs business. A pleasant and agreeable line this, no expense, no patents. For a bureau a café is all that is required, where you are sure to meet five or six people, always at the same table, with a circle of friends. The spring-time is most profitable, for people saunter on the Boulevards, and you can bow or speak to the passers-by, which serves as an initiation.

The people who live by these tricks have a special way of shaking hands under the tables; this is their strong point. Not a notice, not a great undertaking is announced, but they say, "I was in it."

Not a grand failure, but they lost by it. Ah, these bankers! They abused these bankers, like a man abuses an insatiable, avaricious mistress. For the banker is the kernel of the whole affair. And to the banker is often joined a deputy. There are many reasons for this. The first is it looks well to be counseled with a deputy. People in business admire long processions, inaugurations of statues, public ceremonials, where one is sure of occupying a good place and seat, when a deputy honors you with his friendship.

Then, again, it fills you with pride to say, "I was yesterday in the Hall of the Pas Perdus."

"Oh! then you go to the Chamber?"

"Do I go to the Chamber? Why, I am intimate with Saint Blaise."

It was inconceivable how well many people talked of Saint Blaise; they put him into every dish that was seasoned with "Sauce, à la financière."

It was not exactly his fault that he had lately neglected the affairs of the republic to attend to his

own. He had just been asked for his advice about an industrial enterprise for his friends. Saint Blaise was obliging, a question of temperament. He gave his advice, and received in return some bonds on Barbadoes? The scheme prospered. He cherished the friend who directed it, saying:

"I have always great luck with these things."

One day this friend asked him to do another kindness. A little favor. At your service. And Saint Blaise saw already the Barbadoes bonds on the mantle-piece of his apartments.

He prepared his advice. But no. It was another important affair in agitation. The government was on the point of giving a large order to a colliery, which would gain very largely.

"My dear deputy, there are sixty thousand francs to gain."

"Sixty thousand francs?" Saint Blaise felt a kind of electric shock, and said, "My friend, it would be heart-breaking to see this sum gained by others."

"Exactly so, my dear deputy. And the affair being before the commissioners, there will be time. You are so influential."

"You flatter me, and my position, title."

Saint Blaise thought it pleasant to gain sixty

thousand in exchange for the Barbadoes loan. These manufactories have so many chances. Then the manufacturer, guessing the cause of the visitation of Saint Blaise, glided like a cat and whispered in the deputy's ear, "In such a great undertaking, I would consider you as my partner, and there would be a division of profits."

And then, pretending all-souled pride, he said to Saint Blaise, "It would be for the good of the country, for you know how superior is my manufacture; you know my factory."

Saint Blaise replied, "Certainly, certainly. It would be for the good of the country, and the good of my country is the only thing which influences my actions."

A few days after the order was given to the friend of Saint Blaise.

Some people called it an arrangement over a bottle of wine, but others, well up in the march of events, said, "It was the country which held the first consideration in his heart, and the welfare of his country dominated all his actions."

All this affair passed under the civil expenditure in which Saint Blaise voted in with all the ministers and was very obliging to the "Liberals," the party of the future.

He felt that there would be a change soon, and he did not wish to belong to the beaten party, being, as he said, a sensible man and the father of a family. Oh, this family, indeed! Madame Saint Blaise and her dandy son; also the two young girls. All these extravagant ones; Saint Blaise indeed ought to make money upon money, with his appointments and offices; for money was always the one thing wanting in his household.

"This life in Paris cost the eyes out of your heads."

When Madame Saint Blaise said this, she rolled her eyes in her great fat head.

She did not hesitate to say, cleverly enough, "As if you had not better have kept to your lawyers' chambers in Livone! Ah, there is where they discuss politics!"

Was it this woman, or the children, or the father, who swallowed up all the money?

But Saint Blaise coolly bowled them over with one turn, talked to them of anything but politics,—of the ground and its culture, to the peasants,—in the sonorous patois of Gascony; of harvests and crops he talked to landed proprietors. He never went to mass, but his wife never once missed her opportunity of going. And when the family made

their pilgrimage to Lourdes, he took care to be away out of the town. He always bowed to the curé. He often called on the old president, whose Bonapartist antecedents were well known to all; but if by chance Saint Blaise met this gay bird of the Empire, sent to Lambessa, he gave him a hearty shake, saying :

"The friend of all electors !"

And well did these electors understand him, and suspected him, too. A deputy, what is he good for, but to be useful and do good service to all ! Those he had recommended from Livone in his life, schools, colleges, banks, exchanges in the departments and government. How many letters written to mention works in hand. There never was a department so well known as that of Livone, with the white envelope of the Palais Bourbon, and round stamp, "Chamber of Deputies."

Then, again, during election time, you should see Saint Blaise cajoling the small voters ; sending a wagon full of groceries ; with a woman, devoted to him, buying the votes for a pound of sugar or even two pounds of candles.

Saint Blaise never had a sou. He often used the remark made by those who did not wish to re-

count their past history, "What can you do, you know! One wants money!"

He required fabulous sums of money; debts he had on all sides,—from the modistes, dressmakers, tailors, and payments in arrears. When a grand order did come, it was taken up for past debts, so that the very next day he was still in trouble and wanted more money.

He had adroitly managed his party on the 16th of May, and notwithstanding that he was assured of his re-election to Livone, thanks to some great tobacco warehouses, and three appointments of preceptors, he only thought of politics as a future, and laughed at it.

But he held firmly to his title of deputy. Some people said he held also very firmly (the envious ones did) to his payments.

It was his chance,—the situation, which allowed him to take a share in the councils of administration. He said he had a special taste for these little political turns and twists in the administration. Saint Blaise thought he could effect a special point between the two factions. He forgot, however, that he had licensed and made the railroad of the outer circle of Paris; that he was a business man in his own district. He was often attacked, calumniated,

by energetic men ; candidates, able, clever, talented.

When the elections were over, and the game well played and finished, Saint Blaise quickly returned to Paris, irritated at the thought that business had been troubled and a little mixed up in his absence. He went, really happy to find himself again in the Hall of the Pas-Perdus. In the front and foremost act was the idea of his recommendations, his commissions, and his legalizations of lotteries.

" And all that I do in this matter, why, it is all for the good of the country, sirs."

The welfare of the country deserved a good, broad back. But again, why does not the republic pay more largely its statesmen ?

Saint Blaise would never have wanted money in the sense that Gaetana, Bressac, and other Bohemians of the literary, worldly, political set did, who had begun life by launching out into expense and luxury, and then had not the moral courage to stop and pull up when ruined.

While the deputy was courteously saluting Gaetana as a beautiful woman, Bressac examined Saint Blaise shrewdly during the mutual exchange of compliments and civilities. He was a short, stout man, rosy, with grizzled hair ; badly shaved ; a good-

natured head and face, lighted up with two bright, intelligent eyes.

He observed the manner in which Gaetana had been received by her banker. "A charming man, is he not, Madame la Baronesse?"

"Charming, really. He has shown such kindness. All my troubles are over, and I have a real and great gratitude."

"I am only too happy, Madame la Baronne."

This was a weakness of Saint Blaise, his love of titles. In the country he had rubbed up against all sets of parties, Bonapartists, Radicals, Orleanists; but if he met real nobility, his politeness was overpowering.

Thus it gave him pleasure to repeat these words, "Madame la Baronne." Van Dernicht had introduced him to Gaetana for a lottery affair, which had failed, and he had continued his visits to her from time to time.

It was one footstep in the Faubourg St. Germain. He was with her the day of the grand crash; he had come to ask her help in a gigantic affair in which he could make a fortune in a month. Gaetana, overwhelmed by her losses, said, "Let us talk of this by and by, to-day it is impossible. You must find me a backer, a support."

This backer Saint Blaise soon found. A letter of four lines to his banker, "Make a full statement to the Baroness Rinazzi, she is indispensable to us for the issuing of the circulars of Montezuma mines."

And now that he had rendered Gaetana great help, he had come to see her as a friend.

Gaetana, like adventuresses in general, thought as the danger was for the time averted, hoped it might be forever. She gave herself to new fancies and visions for the future.

Had not Saint Blaise yesterday only showed her a marvelous plan.

"I was too troubled, Monsieur le Député, to pay strict attention to the plan you told me, a surprising revelation. Do you know M. Bressac? He is a grand friend of mine, who counsels me in my little affairs and negotiations; besides, he is, I think, one of your country-people?"

"Ah, a compatriot. Ah, indeed!" Saint Blaise was going to tell Bressac he knew him as a child, but the adventurer, who did not like useless falsehoods, cut him short by saying:

"No, sir, I have never had the honor of meeting you before."

There was something so decided and abrupt in his tone that Saint Blaise was astonished.

"You, perhaps, are not of my opinion."

"On the contrary, sir, like you, I have not one."

Bressac, notwithstanding his anger, and forced by his bullying nature wished to direct the conversation in the affairs, which would lead to a result. Thus it was why he wished to browbeat Saint Blaise, who replied:

"These questions in finance and industries do not interest you, sir?"

"But they do, my dear deputy, and clearly explained by you."

Then Bressac became amiable; having shown his superiority—that was all he wanted.

Saint Blaise said, "Just now there is on hand a very grand enterprise which interests me much for the good of my country, and which will yield great profit. It is about mines of nickel. You know nickel is of great use and in demand for articles of toilet, fancy goods, and artistic objects."

Then he began a little lecture, as if he were expounding it all to a host of bond-holders and speculators, of the importance of nickel, for gas lamps in houses, offices, watches, chains, clocks,—

nickel would revolutionize the science of clocks and chronometers, do away with that common old metal "gold," and then with some verses to the point. Bressac feared Saint Blaise was going to pronounce a funeral oration on Louis d'or. And as the deputy continued his pompous speech in the high flown, flaming language in which he addressed the representatives of the people, Bressac asked himself the question, "Does this good man believe all he is saying?"

After this wordy tirade, Saint Blaise got to the kernel of his nut, saying: "Now we have conceded the vast importance of nickel, the next question is, where was nickel found? Formerly in the Caucasus, but in small quantity, and it did not please the public taste, and so they sought out new mines. Some years ago a merchant found in Caledonia firearms made of a brilliant white metal—this metal was nickel."

Bressac said, "Is this a fact?"

Saint Blaise then spoke of Spain. The mines of New Caledonia were considerable, the working easy, but the transport so costly that the price was absurdly outrageous.

"Give up that island, speak of the mines. The mines and politics signify so little, dear

deputy; speak only of nickel, as that is the business."

"Well, then, in Spain, south of Malaga, they have found mines of cobalt, and of nickel. Now do you see your advantage?"

"Yes, of course, no freight and carriage duties."

"But to you and me this is of no account, for you have not of course the idea of turning into a miner. Neither have I."

"Evidently there is a company to establish, prospectus to send out, and on this prospectus a great deal to gain."

Saint Blaise looked in astonishment at Bressac; Gaetana felt a pride and pleasure in the clear intelligence of her lover. She pressed his hand, saying, "That is just it, you have found out."

Bressac continued coldly, "You can of course settle this business with the people of the south. Spain is near the south. You could not dream of starting this to the Parisian public, for they have not yet recovered from their late shock."

Saint Blaise replied: "Ah! but the affair is first-rate, the mineral is abundant and rich."

Bressac made an impatient movement.

"What does that matter to us? What does con-

cern us, is the starting of the affair. To whom belong these nickel mines?"

"To a Spanish society composed of Frenchmen."

"Has a concession been obtained, deputy?"

"Absolute, for twenty years."

"Then have you a banker?"

"A banker in Monsieur Rechna, and a first class counselor in Van Dernicht."

"Ah! Van Dernicht." Bressac then thought of the superb affair Van Dernicht had told him about in the afternoon.

Saint Blaise changed his attitude; he felt like a child before Bressac. Always a superior dash in a finished rascal to a mediocre one. Bressac knew all about these mines, and that they were worth nothing at all. And then he thought if now he should lay before the public a resumé of the ruin and distress which had frightened the Bourse. He began to see through Gaetana's object.

Bressac asked, "Have you good advisers in your administration?" Said he, after a silence,

"No, not one, we want some."

"Yes, you do; your Rechna is next door to a thief, Van Dernicht no better. And to present this matter to the public, you must have good, honorable, titled names. You must dazzle the

world before circulating a prospectus, especially the day after a crash."

"I want," said Saint Blaise, "Madame la Baronne to get me some names."

Saint Blaise turned to Gaetana, who made a gesture indicating her lover. "Monsieur Bressac knows as well as I do. You must have some decorated and distinguished nobility. This costs very dear. My banker is disposed to be generous. Then you could start the affair in your Department."

"Yes," Saint Blaise said, "I have thought of the Marsies, and the Duc de Roquemont."

"All these do not count for much; they haven't a farthing; every one knows they are all ruined," said Bressac, disdainfully.

"Then I had thought," said Saint Blaise, "though perhaps it would be difficult, of the Count de Mercoeur."

Bressac replied, "Raoul de Mercoeur's name would be invaluable, as he has never been mixed up with financial undertakings; his name is fresh and good. Through his wife he is more than a millionaire. He takes a first rank among the Gascon nobility."

"Do you know him, Monsieur Bressac?"

"Intimately, one of my best friends."

"Will you then undertake to speak to him?"

"I will do so, but I forewarn you that the Count de Mercoeur will want a large slice. How much does your banker hope to gain on the first starting of the prospectus?"

"That I cannot say."

"Now, my dear deputy, none of those triflings. At how much do you put the capital?"

"At fifteen millions, I think."

"Well, then, three millions can easily be gained by a single stroke—a pull of the wire; if your banker will undertake to give Madame Rinazzi and I, in case of success, one million, and we bring you the name of the Count de Mercoeur in your list of patrons and administrators. Do you thoroughly understand?"

Saint Blaise replied, "I can promise nothing until I have seen Rechna."

"I will accompany you, if you please, to see Monsieur Rechna. Think well over it; the name of Mercoeur is sufficient to raise high your schemes, for with his name you could have also the Marsies, the Duc de Roquement, General Moustil, and the Messieurs de Lansac and de Combat.

Saint Blaise then retired.

Gaetana mockingly turned to her lover, saying, "Well, my dear friend, was I right or wrong, when I said your friend de Mercoeur was worth a million?"

Bressac remained some time silent; then, laughing heartily, said one word to his mistress, "Go along, you *canaille*."

XV.

"HERE, Jeanne!" said Raoul, as the train slowed up at Livone, and opening the window curtain, from which could be seen a great square dwelling, with white walls, at sight of which Raoul's eyes were obscured by tears.

Jeanne, anxious to see all she could see, found that she could only discern the slated cupola of the Palace of Justice. The barrier gateway, the guard with red cloak, as sentinel, passed rapidly, and, while the engine was whistling and puffing, the porter called out:

"Livone! Livone! Five minutes to wait!"

As they stepped on the platform, Jeanne heard the voice of Mademoiselle de Lansac, saying:

"Give me the little one."

And looking round the family circle, she noticed the sharp profile of the Vidame of Lontras, and the cousins, Combat and de Lansac, all dressed up as if for a *fête*, well gloved, with white neckties, and swallow-tailed coats.

Their hands were frankly offered to her and

Raoul. Jeanne felt full of happy joy; she had now found a family, also friends. She seemed quite at home when she bowed to the station master, the servants, the coach cab drivers, who uncovered before her. All these people spoke in a gay tone, saying pleasantly :

"Eh, now ! Good-morning, Monsieur de Mercoeur."

"Some even said, "Good-morning, Monsieur Raoul !"

Along dusty roads, bordered by trees, they drove ; and in winding paths, before arriving in the town, the streets of which paved with flinty stones, and where was situated the house of Mademoiselle de Lansac. And hearing the women chattering at their doors, Jeanne felt a repose, free from the emotions of Paris. She saw before her at the end of the street, under the awnings, a dozen of Livonais men who were leisurely walking and smoking their cigars.

"You must take something here," said Mademoiselle de Lansac. "You must go later on to the chateau ; at present it is too warm."

Jeanne scarcely had time to feel the stifling Gascon heat, when she was installed in the close, stuffy dining-room. "A little bouillon for baby,"

said Aunt de Lansac. "Raoul, take care of your wife." The dowager was absorbed by the child. She was unfastening his little cloak. "This poor dear little treasure. Is he not lovely? You are not going to cry?" she rattled on.

The cousins and the Vidame had gone away, saying:

"See you to-morrow!"

"Yes, Vidame, to-morrow; for to-night, no game of piquet."

"Certainly not, neither piquet nor visite; no thought to disturb the home life to-night."

"All to-night for the little grandnephew. Ah! this love of a child! Why, he sleeps; look! And he is beautiful, notwithstanding Paris."

It was no fault of hers, but Mademoiselle de Lansac held a fixed idea that everything coming from Paris was bad and wicked!

Then she smiled shrewdly, thinking of the embarrassed smile given her by her Cousin de Lansac, who had, she imagined, for a long time sought her inheritance. "But no! The heir was here. This wee bit of a man!"

Then turning quickly to Raoul, she said, "Ah, now, how could you have such a beautiful little mortal!"

Jeanne gave way to a feeling of charming ease. Surprised by the southern custom of keeping the shutters closed, she looked in twilight at the paltry old furniture, the piano serving for a flower-pot stand, the bowls of copper and brass, and the clock under a glass globe, the table in the center of the room, with the eternal album; all very clean, bright, and shining. And in the corridor leading into the drawing-room, in walking past the wardrobes, between two rows of green plants, Jeanne caught the odor of soapsuds, saw closets full of household linen, and sheets and table napkins by the dozen.

Toward five o'clock a great noise was heard in the street of two horses prancing and chafing. Jeanne went to the window, and saw the women of the adjacent houses with their children in their arms drawn near, while the coachman harnessed the horses. They talked and laughed merrily. The coachman sometimes launched forth an oath, sometimes gave a flick of his whip to the urchins rolling in the road near the horses' feet.

Jeanne looked about for Joseph, then she remembered that the home of his parents was quite out of the town. The good fellow had gone to see and embrace them. It was a day of happiness for

all. Jeanne was gay, and one would have thought that the same happy feeling would have extended to Raoul. The sun had set behind a little hill, when they arrived at Mercoeur. Raoul remained silent.

The old residence of the Counts of Mercoeur had lost something of the lordly air that the old chateaux of Louraine and Normandy had still retained. In former times it was an old fortress, commanding views of the roads and the river, with a square tower pierced full of loop-holes. This tower had been half destroyed, and at present served for a pigeon house—the finest in the country. The chapel in which the Seigneur of Montluc said his prayers and counted his beads before besieging around Lectoure, was changed into a granary ; and the walls of gray stone were now as white as chalk. In the Hall of the Guards, Raoul's father had put the hay and straw ; and to enable the vineyard and harvest wagons to come in well and easily, they had knocked down the old walls which supported two wings, so that from the avenue the principal and habitable part of the house seemed the only remains of the old chateau.

Its aspect was still grand and fine. It had a high façade nearly all in one piece ; each story was ornamented with eight crossed oriels, of which

the carvings of the columns were decorated with Renaissance and Gothic sculpture. The door was large, and underneath the argive arch, a great escutcheon, which time had much destroyed, bore the following motto engraved on its banner :

"Always right and true."

Raoul descended from the carriage ; and after assisting his aunt to alight, offered his hand to his wife.

"Countess of Mercoeur," said he, "you are at your home."

By this little sentence, sadly uttered, Raoul wished to recall to Jeanne that he considered himself culpable toward her ; and of this place, so full of glorious souvenirs of his ancestry, she, Jeanne, was now mistress.

They then entered the chateau. Jeanne remained a long time in the immense salon, which occupied the greater part of the first floor with its two fireplaces, the classically arranged portraits of the family, and the hangings of a landscape scene, which separated the dining-room.

Jeanne went toward two modern portraits :

"Ah ! are these your parents, Raoul ?"

Aunt de Lansac, for the first time, felt that there was a little tragedy in this young establishment.

The silence since they arrived at the chateau, the dramatic manner in which Jeanne said, "Your parents." Then with her kind hearted instinct she decided on taking Jeanne's side.

The windows of the Court of Honor lighted up a large gallery, which extended from the drawing-room to the dining-room, and these two rooms looked out on the river.

"Come and see here, little one," and Mademoiselle de Lansac led Jeanne to the drawing-room windows, and showed her the water rushing over a bed of rock, about twenty feet above her. From this side the chateau had a wild look, almost feudal. On the opposite bank a peasant keeping the cows at pasture opened his eyes in astonishment, and uttered a cry of surprise to see faces in the windows of the drawing-room.

"In this part," said Mademoiselle de Lansac, "the Chateau of Mercoeur is impregnable."

Notwithstanding all the old maiden lady's efforts to give a lively, gay air to the chateau, it retained a look of sadness, and a smell of moldiness and damp earth.

"Now, come and see the rooms."

They ascended to the first story by a stone staircase. Raoul leaned on the iron balustrade.

"My mother's room," said he; "it shall be yours."

Jeanne smiled quietly and simply said, "Thank you, Raoul."

Mademoiselle de Lensac tried to be a little gay and lively.

"And yours was also there, you wild boy. Were you not spoiled there? And now we will spoil your boy!"

Aunt de Lansac had arranged the cradle and bed for the nurse in the room where Raoul's valet used to sleep. While the two women were descending the stairs, Raoul called Joseph, who was lounging under the last rays of the sun, telling all the people round him of the wonders of the capital.

"Come along, help me."

Taking the cradle, he carried it into Jeanne's room by the bed. "You know the baby always sleeps beside madame." They then carried in the nurse's bed.

"And your bed, sir?"

"You will find that in my room upstairs, you will arrange it, and bring it to my room here, on this floor."

Mademoiselle de Lansac cried out, "What are you doing up there?"

"I am coming down," said Raoul.

Jeanne was seated in the dining-room before the steaming soup tureen, waiting for her husband before commencing to serve. Then when all were there, Raoul sitting facing his wife, his aunt on his right hand, with the baby between them, the dowager said :

"My children, Jeanne begged of me to repurchase Mercoeur. For two years now Mercoeur has belonged to me, and as you succeed to all I possess, I give you Mercoeur from to-day. It is my wedding gift to you, only you must permit me to settle it on your son."

Jeanne rose, and embraced the aunt. Raoul now explained to himself how and why it was nothing had been changed in the chateau ; the furniture in the same place, and the same hangings on his mother's bed.

"Ah ! my dear good aunt, you have done all this, and I never even supposed it ! "

"Oh ! indeed," said the aunt, "do you suppose that I should allow Mercoeur to leave the family and be sold ? "

"And the lawyer Lousseteau never said a word to me," replied Raoul.

"I had strictly forbidden him. Come now, no

more embraces, or kisses. Let us come to table, sit down."

Raoul felt himself growing smaller and unworthy before these two women. Decidedly the women of his family were better, braver than the men.

After dinner they conducted Mademoiselle de Lansac to the end of the avenue, and on entering the house, Jeanne said to Raoul :

"I am so glad that you were willing to come here, we shall be so happy."

"Happy!" Ah! was this ironical? "Happy!" living a separate life in this home, where happiness had always existed! "Happy?" lying to the world, to the family! "Happy!" despised by his family, his wife; humiliated, wicked! No, no! For him all happiness was over! Only one hope remained, to find in the affection of Mademoiselle de Lansac the means of washing clean his name. And then! After that? The answer most simple seemed to his mind to be that one which he had thought of in Paris—to kill himself. To kill himself—it was foolish, cowardly! For a man to kill himself who had lived a tranquil, middle-class life—to kill himself was an act of courage; for a high liver, a gentleman in high society, who was habitu-

ated to face death, was the answer, the end, to which one only had recourse when afraid to live.

"Besides, I have sworn I will never kill myself." He said this when alone, sitting on his bed. "And," he added, "Have I the right to kill myself? Should I be an honest man to do so? Now supposing my aunt consents, and she will consent, and can procure for me these three hundred thousand francs, even then shall I be justified in putting a bullet through my head? No no! My aunt has already given Mercoeur to my child. She will leave him all her fortune. It will therefore be my own child whose good fortune I shall frustrate. Have I then the right to do this?"

The nobleman of fashion, the fast liver, was dead in him. His conscience had little by little modeled itself on that of Jeanne. Did she not say to him the parents ought to forget and obliterate themselves before their children. The Viscount of Mercoeur has the only right to command us. And Raoul had no right, no—nothing at all. No fortune, no chateau! it belonged to his child.

In taking these three hundred thousand francs, he was robbing his son. A mistake, a fault, that would pass off. But a debt! No, that had to be paid. Paid? He! With what?

Jeanne thought this sojourn at Mercoeur was necessary to regenerate her husband. If she only had known the proud sentiments of truth and loyalty which were surging up in Raoul now, from that first night in heart and soul, she would have understood that the work of regeneration was already finished in him ; all through her love.

Their first days of life at the chateau were almost isolated ones. Mademoiselle de Lansac had spoken of making several visits to the neighboring nobility of the town and suburbs.

Jeanne replied, " We are so happy here with you, my aunt. Besides, we are scarcely settled here yet."

" That is true, my little one. Also, I do not wish you to come again yet to see me. It is I who will come to you daily. And it is not for you, neither is it for your husband ; but it is for baby."

And every day she carried baby away, taking him from his nurse and his mother, kissing him, and talking to him.

One night when it was very dark, Raoul said to his aunt :

" Jeanne seems tired to-night, if you wish I will accompany you alone."

" Certainly, yes ; little one, rest quiet."

"But I feel quite strong enough to accompany you."

"No, no, my dear; it is better for us to go alone."

Jeanne, without exactly reasoning on this matter, thought it would be better to let her husband and his aunt be alone together; so, sad and pensive, she returned to the chateau as they walked onward.

"Ah, then," said Mademoiselle de Lansac, when alone with Raoul, "you are going to tell me all that has passed between you and your wife,—I have observed."

"No, no, not here. When we are at your house together."

"It must be something important, then."

They pushed on quickly, anxiety caused the old lady's head to throb.

"See, now, what have you done to the little one?"

Two or three times she put this question to Raoul, without getting any reply.

"By and by," said he, "at your house."

And this persistence showed Raoul how far he was wrong, as his aunt seemed to imagine beforehand on which side was the wrong-doing.

Mademoiselle said to her servant, "Mariette, if the Vidame comes, you will say that I have not yet returned from the chateau."

"In the mean time, Raoul, speak, now."

The dowager, seated in her easy chair, waited anxiously. And at the sight of her nephew, sad and gloomy, she was seized with a feverish trembling. She remembered he was the son of her sister, and drawing him toward her, said:

"My little boy, tell me, what is it?"

She put so much tenderness into the words that Raoul put his head on her knees, and sobbed out:

"What would you have," said he. "It is too much, too hard for me to bear. I weep now; if my mother had been here, I should have wept also."

Then, after a silence, Mademoiselle said:

"What is the secret between you?"

"Something terrible, a horrible fault."

"Committed by you?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. I fancied from the first night here. Tell me all about it."

"When you came to Paris, you asked me how it was possible any one could have given me for a wife, I, a ruined nobleman, a young, beautiful and

rich girl. Well, this marriage was an arranged affair. You say how, what? Well, then, it was a buying and selling, a market, if you like to say so."

"Ah, unhappy one;" said Mademoiselle de Lansac, covering her face with her hands. The offended accent of the old lady frightened Raoul.

"Yes, I know it well, my aunt. It was infamous; a thing that no really good woman could pardon; but you—you will pardon your own sister's son."

"And Jeanne—Jeanne—my niece; did she know of all this?"

"Jeanne, my aunt, through all this behaved admirably; *I* was the miserable one—Jeanne's mother, a silly woman, a tradesman's wife, was dying to see her daughter a countess,—permitted her daughter to be married by adventurers,—a sort of underhand agency, which under false, worldly pretense, takes advantage of our hybrid, mundane society, and exercises its hideous calling."

Mademoiselle interrupted her nephew, and said in a sarcastic tone:

"I understand now, what that Bressac and the baroness were doing in your midst; but tell me."

"My aunt," said Raoul, "I have already suffered

so much, that I beg of you not to reproach me. Overwhelmed, lost, covered with debts, unfriendly with you, I was led on day by day by Bressac, and the woman Gaetana de San Rinazzi; and then, half mad and half foolish, I was driven into being a dishonest man. I wrote—I signed a letter, of which the words are always present in my remembrance:

"'*I, the undersigned, Raoul Pontais, Count de Mercoeur, promise on my honor to give to the Baroness San Rinazzi the sum of three hundred thousand francs, out of the dowry of Mademoiselle Jeanne Berthout, if, through her aid, this young girl becomes my wife.*'

"All this took place in June. A month afterward, Jeanne became Countess de Mercoeur. You know her."

"Unfortunate boy! Never reveal this secret to your wife—she loves you so much."

"She is ignorant of it all, my aunt; but that is nothing."

"Then you have not paid, Raoul?"

"No, aunt."

"Well then, I will pay; I will."

"Ah, my aunt, thanks, thanks."

"Thanks? No, it is not for you I do this,

Raoul ; it is for the family name. It is also for her—poor little girl. And you, Raoul Pontais, Count de Mercoeur, have acted like this ? "

Raoul could not speak.

" But," said his aunt, " as Jeanne does not know of all this matter, what causes the coldness between you ? "

" One day Bressac came to see me. He asked for the payment of my debt. I could not pay him the three hundred thousand francs. That is not easily found. I searched, I struggled, I would have done whatever I could to pay this debt, to pay it alone ! Ha ! I loved, I love my wife, I admire her ; she is as good and worthy as you are, as my mother was ; beside her I have again become what I had ceased to be, an honest man. You heard of the great crash, of the terrible ruin which overwhelmed all the nobility. Carried away, advised by the most important men of our party, I speculated on the Bourse, and again lost a hundred thousand francs. And that night, when broken-hearted, overcome by this new misery I returned home, I found Bressac visiting Jeanne, whom he dared to insult ; Jeanne——"

" And you did not kill him ? "

" I was going to strike him, turn him out, kill

him, perhaps. He took me by the arm, and said, 'If you strike, I will speak and repeat all to your wife.' And I shrank from the wretched creature. I was a coward."

"A coward! you?" The dowager looked long and fixedly at Raoul; then she, in measuring out her words, said:

"You have done well. You are a Mercoeur; you could not be a coward! There is sometimes more courage in withdrawing than in fighting. And Jeanne?"

"We had a terrible explanation. I was ready to kill myself. She stopped me. I should perhaps have confessed all to her, but I saw that this revelation of my crime—it was a crime—would only add to her tortures. She had a right over me; she wished me to live, she said, to bring up our child. I have lived. All is finished between us. She is the mother, and I the father of the child. Moreover, it is the only tie between us. And I have come to tell you this. You have a fortune. In the the name of my child, in the name of the Vicomte de Mercoeur, save our name, our honor."

"And after that, what will you do?"

"I shall go away. Calm yourself; I shall have the courage not to kill myself. The name of my

creditor will be changed. I shall travel far away, and regain the fortune which I have taken from my child."

Without doubt Raoul had committed a great fault, but the chivalrous courage with which he received the consequences showed something so honest, and loyal, too, that Mademoiselle de Lansac did not dream of reproaching him.

"You then require three hundred thousand francs?" said she quietly.

"Yes, I do, my aunt."

"I have not got all that sum. My fortune was about that sum, but I have given you Mercoeur, which, with the expenses, and the late repairs, have cost me one hundred thousand. But do not fear. I will find that money. Find the money you want. Your friend of Saint Marie, the banker, Lestious, will lend the money to us. I will go and ask him."

"When?"

"From to-morrow; and to-morrow M. Lousseteau will receive the orders to sell all I possess, even my house. An old lady like me does not cost much to keep. I shall tell Jeanne I have lost my fortune. I shall tell a *lie* for the first time in my life. And I shall ask her to receive me. We shall live, we two, all three, in awaiting you. And when you return,

when you have expiated your fault by your estrangement from us, and your work, you will again have a family, wherein you will be loved, and also esteemed."

Raoul took his way homeward, feeling like another man, altogether changed, having had the conscientiousness to repair his fault. The next day, when the young banker Lestious entered his office, his managing man told him, with a certain emotion in his voice :

" Mademoiselle de Lansac is there."

" Mademoiselle de Lansac ? "

This Lestious was of low birth, and, notwithstanding his Legitimist opinions, the members of the old nobility would never consider him of their party. Never had Mademoiselle de Lansac been to see him.

" I am honored, Mademoiselle." He made her sit down. The pale face, the haggard eyes of the old lady struck him.

He felt drawn toward her, feeling she had a great sorrow and trouble. And his heart, noble and pure, throbbed a little.

Mademoiselle de Lansac said, trembling a little :

" It is a service I am going to ask you to render me in my nephew's name."

"Raoul?"

"Your comrade."

"A service—money?"

"Yes, he wants three hundred thousand francs, directly. It is a secret to be kept from his wife. I have two-thirds of that sum, of which one part is with you. I entreat of you to lend us the sum wanting. You will have a legal acknowledgment: I know this affair is out of your usual line."

Lestious replied nobly:

"Mademoiselle, you have yourself told me that it was not business, but a service to render. My friend Raoul de Mercoeur has the right to ask me to render him a service. If I can do so, I am quite disposed to render him aid."

XVI.

From time immemorial, it was always nine o'clock that the Livonais went on Sunday to the mass to pray to God.

The nine o'clock mass was one of those little events which formed part of the existence of the Livonais—like the market on Monday, and every year the pilgrimage to Lourdes, or the tolling of bells during a storm. There were several other masses—at six o'clock, and at eleven o'clock. This last was even sung ; but the real mass, where came the really great society, perhaps the only one in which they thought the Lord descended on earth, was the mass at nine o'clock.

From half-past eight o'clock, the church warden pushed aside all the people who obstructed his path, and ran to the bell to ring the first sound. And at once, in all the houses of the town, one heard the voices of masters and servants calling out in unison, " There the first bell. The first, great goodness, and no one ready yet ! "

And then, sometimes the second bell rang out,

and no one ready. So much the worse for those husbands whose shirts were rumpled! So much the worse for the torn garments, and buttons wanting. Pity for those children, who, dressed long beforehand, rolled in the dust and roads! Scolding, and blame, and cuffs rained on them, with this terrible sentence, "The second bell is rung."

Then, when once the second has rung out, the neighbors question each other from window to window if it is an avowed fact. "Nothing more to be done." "All is over."

In effect and reality, it was considered bad taste to arrive at the parish church when the third bell was ringing out.

The Livonais never have said "the third"; they say, "The last one has rung out!" with an emphatic accent, *the last.* The last, which recalls the Day of Judgment. At this remark they felt guilty.

And then they swarmed under the grand argive of the Gothic portal, and implored all the saints who were tired out in their stone niches, to intercede for them to the good God, and to Monsieur le Curé. Monsieur le Curé, the first pastor of the diocese. He was short, fat, and unctuous; with a ladder of buttons which descended to the bands of

his frock. They had called him the "Canon" with good reason, for the cape bordered with ermine became him to a marvelous degree. His voice was soft and oily when he spoke on this earth as a simple, mortal man, but some envious ones pretended to say that his voice was harsh and stern, when, from the pulpit, that nearest station to heaven, he sought to upbraid the wicked, revolutionary ones.

For about fifteen years the church had been covered inside and outside with a coating of dust and mildew, which time deposits on old buildings; the organ only uttered strange sounds, quite strange to harmony. The faithful ones could scarcely distinguish the stations of the cross before which they knelt; and among the tombs of the side aisles, on the luminous lights of the stained glass windows, rose a high altar, which spread its carved curves and wreaths in stone, and its sun in gilt wood.

It was now that the curé knew well how to awaken the pride of the Livonais, as much in the people, the bourgeoisie, and the nobility.

In acting thus, the curé deserved to burn in eternal flames for all his flock, for pride is one of the seven capital sins. It was simply pride which

induced the Vidame of Lontras to deprive herself of spending the season at Cauterets, so that the new window of the Chapel to the Virgin should bear this legend :

"Given by the Vidame de Lontras."

The Comte de Mercoeur gave a chapel on the lower side. That of Saint Joseph gave rise to a Homeric discussion. The grace did not wish to pay the whole expense, because the face of the holy carpenter did not quite resemble the ideal one which haunted his imagination.

The penny, the halfpenny by day to the poor people, which the curé had promised to the poorest one, this little penny was enough to scratch the walls, and to draw at the end of the church each stone, with a little red paint in the middle, which gave from this side the effect of a grocery shop. Grated windows which, placed between the outside pillars, prevented the little urchins to utilize them as hiding corners when playing at hide and seek, and the great arches which opened on the large doors and graced the flight of stone steps, had been covered with a tint of blue paint which made the wits and *beaux esprits* to laugh at the bad taste of Monsieur le Curé.

The old stations of the cross had been replaced

by fourteen hangings of Boulenger, framed in oak. And the ancient high altar, with its curved and twisted carvings, was removed to make room for a miniature altar made of marble and brass, plated, trimmed up, and colored with lace and little balls, giving the idea of a fête-day cake, decorated with the gew-gaws of Epinal.

Notwithstanding the crude, bad taste, and, above all, ignorance, which dominated the restoration of the church of Livone, it presented a fine appearance with its long and delicate spire, its high pillars and columns exquisitely chiseled, jutting out of the keys of the arches, upon which were sculptured the coat of arms of the archbishop of the diocese; also the arms of the Pope, and of the Counts of Mercoeur.

The second Sunday which followed the arrival at Mercoeur, Jeanne and her husband went to the nine o'clock mass, which Raoul had forgotten the preceding Sunday. Aunt de Lansac had scolded a little on this matter :

" What ! miss the nine o'clock mass ? "

The week had passed so rapidly with the young wife, getting installed, settled, and the hundred and one little details of the house, which had never been occupied for ten years.

Jeanne had thoroughly examined the chateau, and sometimes, helping Joseph and his mother, she had given her taste and her Parisian ideas, having already the desire to build a conservatory in the corridor which looked out on the Court of Honor; making also a separation in the form of a cross, in the middle of this court; laid in turf, so as to make a lawn. Then sending to Paris the portraits in the salon which required restoration, ordering also for the high windows those marvels of lace curtains almost unknown in the south, where luxury in furniture is not thought of; in a word, she acted up the promise she made to herself to embellish Mercoeur.

She found it quite natural that Raoul should leave her for part of the day to visit his aunt. She had arranged that she should not visit until the settling of the chateau had been finished.

"Really, my dear," said Raoul, "you will tire yourself."

She always replied, looking straight into her husband's face:

"I am so happy to do this."

And to see her thus occupied, managing in the chateau, ordering a great wash, superintending the servant's work, seeking little by little to learn the

dialect of the peasantry, it seemed to Raoul that the days of his youth had returned, and that his mother still lived in this world.

There were certain details which often brought the tears to Raoul's eyes. Thus, the bouquet gathered at the moment before dinner, and put at the same corner of the table where his mother usually put it. And by a happy chance Jeanne had divined the very flower vase which his mother had also used.

Jeanne had carried to the salon the music of her young days, but all the folios remained packed up, and when she seated herself before the piano, she took the old dusty folios, yellow, with torn off corners, to play what Raoul's mother had played.

Thanks to these first important occupations of his wife, Raoul could carry out his ends actively with his Aunt de Lansac.

He had already met with difficulties, being obliged to carry on the property sale with secrecy. Raoul was in haste to finish the sale, and nevertheless Lousseteau could not find any purchaser. The banker Lestious sought on his side. The success of the affair was certain, but it seemed it would last for several weeks longer, before it would be completely settled.

Toward the end of the second week of their stay at Mercoeur, Raoul said to Jeanne:

"Are you inclined to make some visits? We cannot keep ourselves any longer from seeing our friends and those of my family."

Jeanne, after breakfast, went up into her room, and came down again, simply, but coquettishly attired, saying:

"You can tell them to harness now, for I am at your orders."

Raoul waited impatiently for the opening scene of the situation. He knew that soon he had to pay Bressac, and destroy the infamous letter, and go away. He wished, before quitting Livone, to present the Countess of Mercoeur to the nobility of the vicinity, to his old comrades in the town; he wished that they should return his visits, so that his position with them should be established in case of his wife having to live alone in the immense chateau. He felt sure that Jeanne would continue to live alone, almost as a recluse, sacrificing herself to the education of her son. During these visits, Jeanne was chagrined and tired by the visitors talking of nothing but *Paris*, the promenades, the theaters, the boulevards, the parties, the fêtes of Paris! And in every house she heard

the same remark, "Ah, you will find it very dull here after Paris!"

Notwithstanding the ridiculousness of this primitive society, as much among the middle class as in the *noblesse*, despite the reserved air of these stiff salons, despite the awkward salutations, the embarrassed manners and sentences of these people who saw her for the first time, she always returned happy to the chateau. She discovered that everywhere they esteemed and loved her husband. Then everywhere they had spoken of her child.

"You will let us see him?"

She surmised that they were grateful to her for having brought her son to Livone, so that he might become a Livonais. And then she won over the most difficult people, by saying these simple words:

"If we could have so arranged it, we should have come here several months ago; but this was impossible."

Among the nobility of the neighborhood, the Combat, the other branch of the de Lansacs, the Marsies, the relations of de Roquemont, the Vidame de Lontras, she felt that they were disposed beforehand to receive her well, not on account of her intelligence or her ladylike manners,

but because she was a link in the chain of nobility which was drawing together more firmly and closely. She excused all defects, the follies of this little world, only to find in it what was frank, honest and cordial. She felt certain in giving her hand to the banker Lestious, that she had shaken the hand of a friend. Raoul told her that his friend was an orphan and lived with his infirm grandmother. Not seeing the grandmother in the salon, she asked to be presented to her. It was only a few words, a little walk into the old lady's room, two or three inclinations before the black dress and trembling figure in the wheel chair by the window, Lestious saying :

"This is Raoul's wife, good mother !"

"Ah, ah !" And the old lady, trembling more strongly than before, said, "Ah ! ah !" but Jeanne's few words had established between the banker and the young wife a bond of sympathy.

Jeanne experienced a new pleasure on the next Sunday morning in the thought that she could go to the mass and there find all those friends to whom she had paid visits during the week. Then it was certain that there she would not see either Bressac or Gaetana, and that in the crowd assem-

bled there, no one would suspect the feebleness of her husband—his fault.

She had arrived almost happy, and did not doubt that she was the object of attraction to the Livonais. She became absorbed in the contemplation of the sun's rays, which descended like a luminous sheet in the painted windows of the choir. Aunt de Lansac had taken care to arrange two *Prie Dieu* chairs with the arms of Mercoeur, beside her own *Prie Dieu* chair in the first row. For be it remarked, notwithstanding all the revolutions, the changes of government, the *noblesse* of Livonaise always occupied the first row in church, the tradespeople placed themselves after them, and the middle of the church was reserved for the people and peasantry. Some of the newly rich families seated themselves at the end, at the foot of the organ, with those men who had come just to show themselves and gossip together.

The entrance of the Mercoeurs had provoked a general curiosity from the moment when Raoul had offered the holy water, in bowing low, to the moment when the two knelt down. There were some whisperings with the rustle of the chairs, some frivolous remarks about the Parisian bonnet, and on the toilette. They found Jeanne too sim-

ply dressed, they thought that she did not wish to do honor to the Livonaise by her fine toilettes, for she ought to know at Livone people dressed themselves in their richest and best for the nine o'clock mass.

Madame Saint Blaise knew well this custom, or rather she had the custom in her blood, for she respected it as much in Paris as in the provinces. And by a curious coincidence Madame Saint Blaise was at the nine o'clock mass on that same Sunday.

The Saint Blaise family were not expected for three weeks. But without doubt some important reason had determined the deputy to use his holiday permit before the vacations. He, his wife, and their children had arrived in the town. It was an inviolable custom of Madame Saint Blaise to arrive at Livone by the last train on a Saturday, incognito, so that the next day they learn her arrival at once throughout the county. For Madame la Député, this unexpected apparition at the mass on Sunday was like an official entry into her good town of Livone. She always showed herself in bright colors, flanked by her two girls. And the people considered they were entitled to be the first, most elegant, and best dressed women in their town. The Livonais had that morning sev-

eral objects of study. Besides their presence there were also two strangers, a woman, tall, large, handsome, elegant, in a showy, loud toilette, a dress of light veiling, white, with colored flowers, cut very low, a scarlet umbrella with black borderings, and a splendid looking face, which showed a fine complexion under the veil ; the Livonais did not perceive the face was painted.

They were struck by her graceful manner of kneeling with the lovely missal book, in red leather and silver clasps. But who was the thin, dark young man, with the air of an officer, who also accompanied Madame Saint Blaise ?

" I assure you," said one of the Livonais, " it is he."

" Bah ! Why should he return here ? "

However, he looked at the arch, the chapels, the spans, the columns, and the little kind of curb stone which was used for illuminations, as the kind of things which all good Livonais are glad to see again.

It was the curb stone which seemed to attract his attention, that curb where the children, the service over, have loved, and still love to run along at the risk of killing themselves. After all, it was perhaps he ! Was it not mentioned that he

had made a fortune in Paris? He was quite clever enough to do that. And, in that case, it was quite natural he should be in company with Madame Saint Blaise. The Deputy of Livone liked to be surrounded by intelligent, able people.

Then the mass begun, their first curiosity satisfied, in waiting for the discourse of Monsieur le Curé, which obliged the faithful ones to turn and show their faces, the men at the end of the church began to talk of an affair which since the morning had absorbed them.

"Have you read?"

"What then?"

"The placard."

"Yes, the yellow one."

"Seemingly there is a heavy sum to gain."

"As for me, I shall ask Lestious before I engage to do anything."

"For anything else that would be prudent, but for this?"

"And what guarantee have you?"

"How! a guarantee. What—from our deputy?"

"Ah! he is in it?"

"If he is in it——"

"Why, he brings out the affair."

"Then, in that case——"

Therefore, as Saint Blaise was in it, numbers of the Livonais felt reassured in reading the great yellow placards, with which the bill-stickers had covered the country.

A MAGNIFICENT AFFAIR!
"SOCIETY OF THE NICKEL MINES OF MONTE-ZUCCA."
Capital, Fifteen Millions of Francs.
Principal Office at Paris.
PRESIDENT—MONSIEUR VAN DERNICHT,
Rue St. Fiacre, No. 7.

The first lines were separate, in great letters, characters grand and large, "to catch the eye," and the inhabitants of Livone and the neighboring villages had all read the placard as soon as it was fixed, and also read the advertisement which was written under the heading:

The public has perhaps noticed for several years the importance that nickel has acquired in the application of art to industry.

Following some observations on art industries and on decorative art, etc., and after some pompous phrases, the advertisement again returned to nickel, the domestic uses of this metal, which astonished the silly boobies, and which has been

a long time written and found in contemporary dictionaries:

The nickel which came formerly from the Caucasus, the nickel which a wealthy financial family tried in vain to draw from New Caledonia, when it is so easy to find at the very doors of France, even here in the South.

What an infinite source of benefit it would be if one could bring this same nickel to France, without having to pay transport or duties!

Well, this is possible. And this time the cost and expenses of the South would not go to enrich the capitalists or monopolists of the Capital. Some mines of considerable size have been found in the south of Spain. Their returns are sure, the quality is superior to those of all the other nickel mines. The future of nickel is in the mines of Montezucca! These mines now belong to us. Some large banking firms wished to buy them of us, but the men who are at the head of this enterprise are not common financiers, greedy of realizing benefits. In putting themselves at the head of the Society of the Mines of Montezucca they have only thought of their country, to this part of France where they have lived as children, where they have all their interests and sympathies. Masters of the situation, they have come to say to you, "We have a special affair to direct. Will you come and help us partake of the profits, or would you prefer that this affair becomes the prey of the men of the North, as many others have done? We to-day demonstrate clearly, succintly, to the public, the marvelous project which we propose. *We cannot yet give the list of all the great names who will form the Council of Administration of this Society, for we wish it complete before we do so. But the public may be sure that these names will be the safest guarantee of the mines of Montezucca.*

Lestious had shrugged his shoulders when they told him about this sentimental circular, but he took

care not to express his impression to the Livonais, contenting himself by replying, when questioned about these famous mines :

"I never trouble myself about the Bourse."

It was only since Sunday morning that the news had spread that Saint Blaise was in town. While among themselves, the practical ones talked over the grand affair at the end of the church ; the deputy on the square, surrounded by his faithful friends, was making a complete essay on metallurgy.

"Exceptional advantages, my friends ! I have seen the moment when the Rothschilds wished to strangle this affair, because of their mines in New Caledonia. And I said to myself, "It is not too grand an affair, fifteen millions ! I shall reserve this for the South ; it will be an enterprise for our region—our department. And all the world will take an interest in it. I shall in this case forget my political opinions, to the end that I may show an impartiality in affairs. I shall unite the most honorable of names ; besides I have promises. I know all the gentlemen from Livone who live in Paris, all have promised me ; all share in this."

And the Livonais said :

"This Saint Blaise—he knows everything."

Saint Blaise very naturally, without the slightest

ostentation, replied, interrupting his theories on cobalt and nickel :

"You know, in the Chamber we must understand all questions."

Then again he resumed about his metallurgy :

"The mines of Montezucca have great advantages."

The service of the mass finished, Jeanne rose and directed her steps to the entrance of the church with Raoul and his aunt. The calm of this great church had done her good.

Jeanne felt sleepy, and feeling Raoul by her side, she experienced a sort of vision of their first meeting at Bellevue, in the little church which stands on the slopes of the railway.

Since her arrival at Mercoeur, she strove to think of her old happiness, and forget the ruin of her love. Raoul took the holy water, which he offered to her, also to his aunt ; his fingers wet. She turned to make the sign of the cross, facing the altar, and found all eyes fixed on her. Then they went out of the wide portals of the church.

"My aunt, pray accept my arm."

"No, no ! give it to your wife ; an old lady like me walks alone."

At this moment, in the midst of the crowd, they heard themselves addressed :

" Raoul ! Good-morning ! How are you, dear Countess ? "

The crowd had stopped to see these elegant people salute each other. They were Madame Saint Blaise and her two girls ; the Duke and Duchess de Roquemont. The Mercoeurs only saw them at first ; and though they entertained an antipathy for them they greeted them with courtesy. They distinguished behind the Roquemonts, who did not conceal themselves, Bressac and Gaetana, with a malicious smile on their lips, also taking their part in the salutation of their friends.

Raoul became livid ; his arm dropped Jeanne's ; but already the young wife had retaken Raoul's, whispering in his ear :

" Not here, Raoul, it would be unworthy of you."

XVII.

On arriving at the chateau, Jeanne, a little confused and stupefied, felt a storm gathering around her, and overcome with emotion, as formerly in Paris, walked about in the dining-room, talking in disjointed sentences to Aunt Economy.

"But sit down, little one, you will tire yourself."

"No, no, my aunt."

She stopped before the picture frames to adjust them, to do over again the folds of the curtains, which she found very ungraceful; arranged the pots of flowers the blinds, the chairs, seeking among these minor details a distraction from her anxiety.

The breakfast had been a silent one, and the return from church not more gay.

The apparition, so sudden, of Bressac and of Gaetana, under the grand portal of the church, had entirely checked, frozen, all the hopes of the young wife. She suspected that Raoul was going to strike this miserable villain, and she congratulated herself on preventing him.

"But now, my aunt, do you know where Raoul is?"

"Is Raoul out, then? I did not know it."

She told an untruth, this good old lady; she knew well enough that Raoul had left soon after breakfast; she had a long talk with him while Jeanne was occupied with her child. Meantime, Jeanne tried to see clearly into the situation. Why were Bressac and Gaetana at Livone? with the Saint Blaises? the Roquements? No doubt it was a machination of Bressac's!"

One thing reassured her; that was, during all the meal time Raoul seemed very calm. Jeanne understood Raoul was disturbed by passion, but it was a cool, courageous feeling. She knew that their false situation must have an end, and the end approached. Raoul ought to be master of the situation. She felt it. She wished it to be.

Oh! if Aunt de Lansac had only had the happy thought to leave them alone for a moment, she would have said to him:

"Raoul, a man like you does not fight a poor wretch like Bressac. He contents himself by sending him away, and giving him money. We are rich; take what you want. Obliterate him; let him disappear."

It was wrong of Raoul to go away without confiding in her. Evidently he had gone to hasten the end, and to drive away this man. And she ought to stay at home, and receive her visitors.

"It was the custom in the Mercoeur family," Aunt de Lansac said, "not to leave the chateau on a Sunday. The mother of Raoul held her receptions on Sunday, little one. You will see all our friends arrive in flocks—the Combats, the Vidame. This poor Vidame does not know what to do, now that I have given up piquet. And the Marquise de Nuylaurens, and the abbé! Look! here comes the abbé in a chair; they are all calling him Monsieur le Curé. I cannot, in our world, call him anything else but l'abbé."

She tried to laugh, in assuming the airs of an old marquise; really she was as agitated as Jeanne.

Jeanne placed herself on a stool beside the armchair of Mademoiselle de Lansac. She lifted toward her her lovely eyes, which were dimmed with tears.

The old lady would have tried to utter a pleasant joke, but only could find these words: "Hear now, Jeanne, I adore you!"

She then pressed Jeanne toward her, as if defending her from danger.

"And Raoul does not return. My aunt, do speak to me frankly. I do wish to know where he has gone; I am courageous."

"But I assure you, little one, I do not know."

The commencement of the conversation was interrupted by the rumbling noise of one of those heavy berlins, in which all the country folks travel. The Marquis de Nuylaurens descended from the berlin, and then turned at once to assist the marquise to alight. Both of them trembled with old age, but they entered very gayly into the salon, arm in arm.

"I present to you the wife of Raoul," said Aunt de Lansac, who knew that the Nuylaurens were not at home when Raoul had taken his wife there.

The marquise advanced to Jeanne, saying:

"Permit me to kiss you." The marquis bent very low to kiss Jeanne's hand, and remained some seconds, because he could with difficulty get up again.

"I knew your husband; I knew him when he was no higher than that! He made mischief and devilment."

As there were no strangers present they did not shower themselves with titles. Other friends, other

relatives, came again now ; all the Cousins de Lansac and de Combat. Gaston de Combat spread his white gloves on his knees, and to show his profound knowledge of Parisian society, he asked with *nonchalance :*

" And that dear General de Moustil, is he in good health ? "

Lansac shut his eyes a little and passed his hand over his beard, the finest beard in Livone.

" And Raoul——"

" Raoul begs you will excuse him, my cousin, but he will be back directly."

The wagonette of the de Roquemonts arrived, making a great noise.

The duchess threw herself into the salon, making little frightened cries, and mocking little grimaces.

" Ah ! dear beauty, dear countess ! "

Then, turning to the dowager, she gave a bold smile, and said some amiable words, but Aunt Economy turned her back on her, to say a good-morning to the Marquis de Lontras. Still young, with his hair quaintly dressed, and his beard *à la* Henry IV, the marquis could not contain his pleasure in entering again the salon where he had shone for so many years, always on Sundays. Seeing the

pots of flowers, the beautiful lace curtains, the draperies of guipure in such exquisitely fine taste, and gracefully coquettish too, he murmured to himself :

" Oh, these Parisiennes, these Parisiennes ! "

They then crowded by degrees into the salon, and Jeanne felt a great joy in seeing this company of perhaps awkward, but good, honest people, with their hearts open to the child of the country, who returned to them with his young wife, who knew how to find a smile for each and all of them.

Then they felt happy that the chateau was alive and occupied again ; for ten years it had seemed like something dead.

Each time that Jeanne and Aunt de Lansac, terrified to be alone in receiving these visits, watched and looked at the avenue, which was white and dusty, and bordered with little iron work in front of the salon, they saw arrive new groups either of gentlemen, or country and towns-people. Raoul in his school studies had always fraternized with the children of Livone ; he had the good sense to consider them not all as friends, but as comrades. He had visited them all with Jeanne ; the return of these ceremonious visits mixed up in the salon of the Chateau de Mercoeur all the

people who at Livone scarcely recognized each other.

Now, even the clergy appeared. Two black profiles were seen turning the road.

Monsieur le Curé, after vespers, had requested his youngest curate to accompany him to Mercoeur. He came to pay his respects to the son of the count, who had so generously permitted him to beautify the parish church. He wished also to pay homage to him, the Count of Mercoeur, as representing that legitimacy which forms the hope of liberal Catholicism in France.

In talking with his curate, Monsieur le Curé had laughed at the bow given by the deputy Saint Blaise, just by the presbytery.

"Saint Blaise! Saint Blaise! Oh, go along with him! He was good enough when we did not have a Mercoeur!"

The respect which every one feels for the pastor made them all rise up in the salon to receive him.

Jeanne offered him an arm-chair near her, while the curate ensconced himself between Combat and de Lansac. Monsieur le Curé breathed hard, for the road was long from the presbytery to the chateau. Every one remained silent, so that he might direct the conversation.

"We can scarcely tell you, Madame la Comtesse, how happy we are to have you inside our walls, our walls." He looked over his spectacles to say this. He stopped, again wanting to breathe, and now the conversation began again.

It was a cross-fire of odd remarks; the news of the country, all throughout one end, for each one to be remarked by the mistress of the house. The curé profited by rare moments of silence to launch forth his most important sentences.

"Our pilgrimage will leave for Lourdes the first week of next month. The company have told me this."

The curé passed half his time in collecting people for his pilgrimage. Jeanne did not occupy herself about the pilgrimage or the useless propositions launched forth about it, for a moment since some names had struck her. They were names pronounced by some young men who were talking to Roquemont in a corner of the salon. They were talking about something which interested the country; an absolute silence supervened. Jeanne asked:

"Of what are you speaking, Monsieur de Roquemont?"

Roquemont placed his eye-glass in his right eye,

similar to a barrister pleading a cause which he has learned by heart.

"You are not ignorant, perhaps, countess, that nickel, day by day, has taken a place of serious importance in its application to the industrial arts and sciences!"

It was with some various boulevardiers, the high-flown pathos composed by Saint Blaise on the yellow placard of the mines of Montezucca. And the demonstration was continuing *en train.* "Superb affair, reserved by Saint Blaise for his compatriots. For us!"

Aunt Economy stopped him shortly:

"Pardon, duke!"

It seemed that Mademoiselle de Lansac must have been violently agitated to launch out the word "duke!"

"Pardon, duke, will you explain to us how it is that a man of your name and rank should be so great an admirer of Saint Blaise—a Republican deputy?"

Roquemont was a little troubled by the disdainful tone of Mademoiselle de Lansac, and replied, as if to excuse himself:

"But it was the Baroness of San Rinazzi who presented me to him!"

Aunt de Lansac burst out into a good laugh.

"The Baroness of San Rinazzi? Who in the world is she?"

"The Countess of Mercoeur can tell you better than I can, Mademoiselle; also my friend Raoul."

Raoul, for the tenth time they talked of him; and Jeanne repeated the same thing:

"You must excuse Monsieur de Mercoeur, he will be here soon."

And Raoul did not come.

Raoul, in a feverish state of mind, sat down in the handsome private room of Banker Lestious; he was as impatient as Jeanne.

He had gone out directly after lunch, taking with him the signature of his aunt, authorizing him to do all that was required to liquidate promptly, in one day even, the sale of her property.

Lestious saw him arrive at the moment, at the very moment he was preparing to visit Mercoeur, to render his homage to the countess.

"I want to speak to you immediately," said Raoul.

"Some trouble, then?"

"Come into your private room; I must see you alone."

And then and there, Lestious, as much affected as his friend, heard what Raoul could not confess without avowing his own shame.

"You know that I owe three hundred thousand francs?"

"Yes, I know that."

"It is to Bressac that I owe it."

"Our old comrade."

Lestious pronounced this with an air of contempt.

"That may astonish you; but it is thus. I will not tell you the nature of the debt, but suppose it was a gambling debt."

"I understand. You want this three hundred thousand francs at once to pay this gentleman and turn him away from Livone."

"It is for this that I wish to see and speak to you."

"Let us see. Now, it is agreed that I lend you a hundred thousand francs. Have you the signature of Mademoiselle de Lansac for the sale of her properties? For, it is natural that I must have a warrant or security, a guarantee for the rest of that sum."

Raoul gave him a paper.

"This is my aunt's power of attorney. You can register it to-morrow."

"Good. I will dictate an agreement between us, and give you a letter of change, payable on Wednesday. I must have one day to get the money in the bank."

The young banker rapidly directed the requisite documents.

Raoul in looking at him felt his soul elevated by a profound sentiment of admiration. Not to have seen his college friend since his boyhood—that far away in Paris—in the cafés and wine shops—thinking himself almost forgotten by him—to find him a friend who without one word of reproach saves your honor!

When Lestious had finished, he stated:

"It is all done, Raoul."

Raoul gave him his hand.

"Thanks, thanks, my old friend."

Both men were profoundly moved.

"Let us go to the chateau, now, Raoul."

"No, not yet. Will you first send a line to Bressac? He is no doubt visiting at the house of Saint Blaise."

Raoul wrote on his card:

The Comte de Mercoeur begs you to come immediately to the office of Monsieur Lestious, banker, where he awaits to settle the affair between us.

"You will leave us for awhile alone, and then we can go down to the chateau."

They remained silent, waiting for Bressac's reply. Soon the servant returned, and Raoul uttered a cry of rage when he read:

Jean Marie Bressac sends his compliments to the Comte de Mercoeur. It is useless for him to accept the rendezvous mentioned, because at this very instant he is going to present his respects to the Countess Mercoeur, accompanied by the Baroness San Rinazzi and Monsieur Saint Blaise. They can be met in the chateau.

"Miserable wretch!" cried Raoul.

"What is it?"

"He dares to visit the chateau! Come along! you do not fear this deputy Saint Blaise?"

"*Parbleu!* No, no."

"Let us run, then. We will take the cross road which runs along by the cemetery. We must get there first to drive them away."

Roquemont had scarcely finished speaking of Saint Blaise, of the Baroness San Rinazzi, and the mines of Montezucca, when Raoul and Lestious entered the salon by a side door. This sudden entrance of these two men caused a sensation.

"What is the matter with you, Raoul?" asked Jeanne.

"Nothing at all, my dear; only we were hurried, that is all."

Raoul had regained his composure, as they saw the troop of Bressac had not come yet. He had begun to shake hands, and inquire after the health of his visitors, never taking his eye off the avenue leading up to the chateau. The curé had undertaken to speak about the pilgrimage to Lourdes; the Marquis of Nuylaurens had kissed him on both cheeks.

Roquemont, watching the avenue as if he expected some one, approached Raoul, and said in a voice loud enough to be heard by every one present:

"My dear friend, Mademoiselle de Lansac has just asked me who is this Baronne San Rinazzi. I told her that you could inform her better about Madame than I can; also about this affair of Montezucca, of which I have only heard by gossip and hearsay. It seems that you are concerned in it. You know well these nickel mines."

Raoul replied unheedingly:

"What affair? What mines?"

"Those mines which you are to direct with Saint Blaise."

"Oh! go along, you are joking, Roquemont."

"No, indeed; Saint Blaise told me yesterday."

"Saint Blaise could never have told you anything concerning me in it, for I do not know him; he does not know me. I have never even spoken to him."

"*Pardieu!* This is too much," cried Roquemont, pushing furiously his eye-glass under his eye-brow. "Look, my dear friend; here is Saint Blaise, whom you do not know; on his arm, Madame de San Rinazzi, whom you may perhaps know better, without doubt."

Raoul turned coldly to Roquemont, saying thus:

"Leave off your raillery, duke; I do not think it becomes you."

Then Roquemont drew himself up, but he judged it prudent to regain the seat by the side of the duchess, finding that Mercoeur was not at all like a commercial man, as Bressac assured him he was.

All the attention was centered on Raoul and Lestious, who stood at the entrance of the salon, not speaking a word and waiting.

It was not without great misgiving that the deputy Saint Blaise had consented to visit at the chateau of Mercoeur. He had boasted on all

sides that the Count of Mercoeur was in the "affair." Bressac had vauntingly told him, "We hold him in our hands; we will make him do all we desire." Gaetana had been obliged to flatter and encourage the brave deputy, who quite understood that he went unarmed into a battle.

At Paris everything had prospered. The Roquemonts, the Marsies, on the representations of Gaetana, and hoodwinked by the assurance that Mercoeur was in this thing, had been amiable, very considerate toward Saint Blaise and his family. Roquemont had given a great dinner, where they had discussed the basis of the affair. They had again spoken of the consent of Raoul as something definite and understood. And Saint Blaise imagined that when he arrived in Livone he should find a message from Raoul, begging him to come to the chateau. Instead of that, only a freezing bow, almost disdainful, to Madame Saint Blaise on leaving the church; nothing more.

And if he ever spoke of Mercoeur to the Livonais, they always spoke in high eulogy: "This Raoul—a real, veritable child of the country; his wife is charming, not proud."

Notwithstanding the wishes of Gaetana, Madame Saint Blaise had refused to accompany them,

and her husband had left home alone with the baroness and Bressac, unquiet and doubting.

But feeling a baroness on his arm, this inspired the deputy with a little confidence.

"You are quite certain we shall be well received, my dear baroness?"

"Yes, I assure you that Monsieur de Mercoeur expects us."

"And you, Bressac; do not you feel any anxiety?"

"Not now, since you saw me send a note to Raoul."

The two adventurers exchanged wicked looks between them, similar to the looks of birds of prey when gloating over a field of carnage.

Bressac, with his false, wrong pride, felt proud to wrestle on his country, where through a fault he had committed they had driven him away, so that he could avenge his country in ruining it, or rather revenge himself in ruining his country. To be revenged! He took pleasure in humiliating the little daughter of a tradesman who had driven him away, like the other traders in the country.

"Come on," he said to himself; "this is a fine, bold stroke, with half a million in prospective."

As to the rendezvous Raoul had given him, it was undoubtedly to beg him to make some arrangement.

They arrived near to the chateau, Saint Blaise with the baroness on his arm, Bressac a little behind, cutting off with the end of his cane the stalks of the plants in the borders, and shaking as he approached. Then he saw that Raoul expected them; but Saint Blaise, blinded by the sun, failed to distinguish the knitted, contracted face of Raoul.

Jeanne quickly turned to Raoul: "What will you do?"

Raoul coolly said: "I never could have thought that these people were bold enough to carry their audacity up to the point of presenting themselves at your house, Madame. I am going to send them off."

In the salon not a word. Gentlemen and tradesmen had risen; the ladies were pale and livid at the thought of a duel. Combat and Lansac, in the relation of cousinship, had placed themselves near Raoul. The curé drew his arm-chair nearer, and resting his arms on the carvings of the elbows, murmured, "Calm yourself, calm yourself, Monsieur the Count."

Jeanne, standing up in the salon, felt herself already revenged. An infinite joy seized her. She had found Raoul, proud, courageous.

The new visitors stopped stupefied on the portico.

Raoul addressed them: "What do you wish, Madame? What do you wish, gentlemen?"

Then there was a silence. Saint Blaise jerked out some words:

"Dear Monsieur de Mercoeur, Monsieur the Count."

"Go on, sir; speak on. What have you come to do here? Eh!"

"Here is Madame la Baronesse and Monsieur Bressac, your friends."

"You are deceived, Monsieur; Bressac and Madame are not friends of mine."

In a corner of the room, Roquemont, inclining his ear to his wife, whispered, "This poor Bressac has made a false step; we acted wisely in not waiting for him to come here."

Bressac, who had remained at the bottom of the steps, threw himself against Raoul, saying:

"Mercoeur, you will withdraw that speech?"

"Miserable creature! go away from here; go along with you, for I shall kill you!"

Raoul threw himself before Bressac with his eyes fixed on his. Bressac, the knave, trembled before Raoul de Mercoeur, who had become an honest man. The idea of crying out loud the shame of Raoul before his wife, and before his friends, had crossed his mind, but he did not dare. He understood now that Raoul would not draw back, and he was afraid.

Gaetana struck the portico steps with her umbrella.

"Ah, indeed! Is there no one here to answer this insult—no man here?"

Raoul said tranquilly to her:

"Be silent, Madame, and leave Livone at once!"

Saint Blaise, feeling that any weakness on his part would compromise not only the success of the mines of Montezucca, but also his re-election, wished to speak in a high tone:

"I cannot understand, Monsieur de Mercoeur, the meaning of your conduct. In insulting the lady on my arm, you insult me!"

"Monsieur," said Raoul contemptuously, "I do not wish to take a roundabout course to insult you. You have dared to affirm to my compatriots, it seems, that I am a party in an affair I know noth-

ing of, about mines which you are to direct—superintend. In stating this, you lie!"

"Monsieur, is it a lie?"

Raoul did not answer, but as his servant came up to him he said to him:

"Joseph, show these people out!"

XVII.

When the house of the grocer Doulens, in the middle of the square, was for sale, Saint Blaise bought it ; not because it suited him better than any other house, but because it was the highest and finest in Livone—three stories and attic.

All the Livonais who in the afternoon came to lounge and gape about the square were forced to see the house, and this made it seem to them that their deputy ought to be the leader of the department. It was covered with a coat of glittering white paint which caused the reflection of the sun to shine on the promenaders ; it had a balcony which would serve well for the stump speeches of a politician. Saint Blaise always used this balcony for the illuminations on public fêtes. The "Balcony Saint Blaise" was as much to be elected and chosen as its master, for it had always taken part in the fêtes and illuminations of all the governments. One great advantage of this house was, that the polling place was directly in front of it, and there was also a seat which the wits of the

town had christened "the box of sardines," where local politicians held impromptu conventions, and the richest burgesses of Livone were often to be seen there, discoursing on public and private matters. This seat is the soul of Livone. All tittle-tattle, gossip, calumnies, emanated from there, and it was from this seat that the genius and talent of the town sprang from. As it was the custom of Madame Saint Blaise to arrive on the eve of Sunday at Livone, this Sunday she offered to her friends and the principal partisans of her husband an enormous dinner, the dinner of the south, fourteen dishes, six kinds of wines, and such sauces as would make an ambassador's cook jealous. Also there was an established idea that only the dinners of the curé could rival those of Madame Saint Blaise.

On this Sunday Madame Saint Blaise had promised herself that she would dazzle her guests; would fascinate and charm them, as she herself had been dazzled and charmed for a month past, by the extraordinary benefits which ought to accrue from the emission of the mines of Montezucca.

This name "Montezucca" sounded in the apartments of Saint Blaise as the war cry of a

fortune. "Montezucca" had become, among other things, the one chosen, the most valued. Answering the questions of his young daughters, "Shall we go to the seaside?" to the complaints of the mother, "that the dressmaker, the milliner, and the tailor, were dunning her for their money," Saint Blaise replied to all but one word, the magical word of his life, the new sesame: "Montezucca."

Above his desk in his office, in the salon, and in his dining-room, there were several photographs of the mines of Montezucca; the hills, the chain of mountains, the roads cut into the rocks, the precipices, the little village of the first miners, the opening of the mine, and even a black hole. To his friends he showed this black hole, which made a black spot on the photograph, and he said simply: "It is there."

And really it was a curious circumstance that the intimacies of the women commenced all at once, when their husbands were mixed up in the same financial combinations. It sufficed that the affair was *en train*, for the last fortnight, for the women to pay one another visits. At the end of three weeks they invited themselves to dinner; at the end of a month they lent each other music;

then they went in a band to the designers of the fashions.

It was thus that Mesdames Saint Blaise and Rechna and the Duchess de Roquemont had become intimate through the beneficial influence of the mines of Montezucca. In these three households they were in the habit of postponing everything till after the announcement of the capitalizing of the mines of Montezucca. "My dears, wait for the capitalizing! then you will see money circulating," their husbands would tell them.

Saint Blaise, Rechna, and Roquemont only uttered this one sentence, but they pronounced it with an insolent assurance, as if not for one second doubting the success of the undertaking.

With a united assent they had acknowledged that the Bank of Paris, too much tried already, would be a bad field for them. So they threw themselves on Gascony, armed with this proud trump card, "the interest of the region," which superseded every other consideration.

"You are sure of Mercoeur?" simply asked Roquemont.

Saint Blaise replied, "Ask Bressac."

When questioned, Bressac or Gaetana replied, with a grand gesture of certainty :

"Mercoeur? he is with us."

The table was handsomely decorated with plants and flowers, and arranged for thirty guests. The kitchen was in confusion; Madame Saint Blaise running about, hither and thither, interrupting her toilet. When an unaccustomed odor greeted her nostrils, she divided her last minutes between the kitchen fire-place and her dressing-room. She hurriedly pushed her family, her husband, her daughters, to make way for this dinner, which was to be her social trump. She had not yet remarked the piteous face of the deputy, who had ceased to talk to Bressac and Gaetana as soon as she entered the salon. She had not noticed that Bressac, somber, enraged, was quite pale, and that this pallor made his skin look more yellow than olive.

The return from the chateau was harrowing to Saint Blaise.

Up to that time, the poor man was exalted. He had thought and he hoped.

He had mounted the steps of the porch with honeyed lips, ready for any cringing in manner which he thought requisite, and he was confronted with an indignant man, who with a terrible voice had driven him away, and had insulted him before a great party of the society of Livone.

"It was all your fault, Bressac—your fault."

"Ah! no, my dear friend, it was you who did not know how to introduce yourself. You said exactly what was enough to prejudice Mercoeur."

"And your Roquemont, who was in the salon, did not even stir."

"Roquemont was visiting Mercoeur; he could not decently come to your assistance."

"To my assistance! You mean to yours!"

"Why that? It was you he first insulted."

Saint Blaise said this timidly, trying to put on to Bressac the pain of removing the insult of Raoul, but Bressac did not care now to face Raoul."

He had left him in Paris, a Count de Mercoeur, weak, unarmed, almost cowardly before him; now he found him strong, courageous, full of dignity. And he, Bressac, he had trembled when Raoul threw this word, "Miserable creature," at him.

While Saint Blaise was slowly following his thought, Bressac approached Gaetana, saying in a low tone:

"I did wrong to retreat; I ought to have provoked a scene."

"What scene?"

"To have crushed this little Mercoeur with one word!"

"Imbecile!" said Gaetana wickedly, "and have compromised us. And if we lose him, we too are lost with him. Go along, then! If Raoul had written to you to-day in giving you a rendezvous at the office of Lestious, and if Raoul had dared just now to insult us, it is because he has his money ready, and he thinks he can balance the situation in liquidating the debt in a few moments."

"Well, then?"

"Well, more than ever we are masters of the situation. We will play your last card; the play is for a million! it is for us to conduct the affair well?"

"But this insult?"

"And are you sufficiently green and silly as to care for anything so insignificant?"

"Will not the credit of Saint Blaise, a credit necessary for the capitalization of the mine, will not that be obscured, touched, if there is not a duel?"

"Oh, pooh, pooh! Have you never thought that this man of politics is like other things—only a weather cock, which we permit ourselves to maneuver about? It is he who was insulted; it was he whose arm I held; it is *he* who ought to fight. Quiet yourself, then; Mercoeur will never fight you."

"And if he kills our Saint Blaise?"

"Kill him, no! We require him. You know those kind of duels are never serious. For the rest, as de Mercoeur has made an error in politeness, he must take the consequences; he must be met."

Saint Blaise was very agitated just at the moment of dinner. He felt he had taken a wrong turn, and he shot furious glances at Bressac, whom he thought was justly responsible. When alone with him, Saint Blaise returned to the same idea.

"At last now, how can you explain this reception?"

"I assure you, my dear deputy, underneath all this there must be a misunderstanding caused by you. And now at this minute the whole fact is town talk here. Why did you tell every one that Mercoeur took part in the affair of Montezucca?"

"You told me so."

"Without doubt, and you will see that I told you the truth; but you should have kept the secret until the last moment. By your manner of gossiping you have endangered the success of your enterprise."

The success of the enterprise! the mines! the capitalizing of Montezucca! All this signified

little to Saint Blaise ; but his heart was torn with the thought that his electors would learn soon that he had been insulted.

" What will my electors say ? "

He walked up and down his salon, he cursed the business, the mines, the luxury of his wife and daughters.

" Then it was for this that he had given up politics. To the devil with nickel ! " And certainly, without doubt, the electors had already heard of this maladventure ; for the invited guests arrived slowly and coldly, as if embarrassed.

They were all surprised to see the deputy so calm, so quiet ; simply with an air of *ennui.* They expected to find him burning with rage, talking of vengeance, of a duel. The recital of the scene at the chateau had run through the town. This was the first act of the tragedy, which left the Livonese impatient to know the end. Saint Blaise, their deputy, the representative of their department or section of the province, had been insulted by Mercoeur, another child of the country, as much loved as Saint Blaise ! Two opposite camps were formed, and the most insane and wild suppositions were given as the cause of this great event.

Madame Saint Blaise, in taking her place in the salon, asked her husband :

" About this visit to the chateau ? "

" Oh, very good, very good ! "

The honest man judged it best not to commence with a storm in the house. The presence of the mayor, who arrived at the same time as the Roquemonts, infused a little more courage into him.

" Monsieur le Maire, I'm delighted to see you."

" Really, Madame la Duchesse, we are flattered ! "

What an astonishment for the Livonese to see the Duke and Duchess of Roquemont at the house of Saint Blaise, and hear the wife of the deputy say to the duchess, " Dear Beauty, the cat."

Never mind ; indeed it was not the first time that their deputy received at his house Baroness San Rinazzi and Duchess de Roquemont ! Already the mayor, whispering in the ear of Souzac, the fat leather merchant, had asked him :

" This matter of the insult, do you think it is true ? "

Souzac, with an air of profound wisdom, declared :

" Between you and I, I do not believe a word of it."

However, Louis Goulone, the proprietor of the

extensive fields which border on the river, said in a low tone :

"Gentlemen, I have heard it from a person well informed."

Bressac and Gaetana had understood the reason of this embarrassment, which weighed heavily at the commencement of the dinner, and little they fought against this. Some little words from Roquemont, a pleasant speech from Bressac, an amiable remark from Gaetana, and then, capping all, the lively spirit of the duchess, had partially restored the equilibrium of Saint Blaise.

This Mercoeur, who was he, after all? A provincial ; a country fellow, enriched by the daughter of a merchant! And Saint Blaise found a little turn in the conversation which soothed his rage against Raoul. Monsieur de Mercoeur was noble by birth, but a trader by his wife. Then they got to the fine wines.

"Monsieur le Duc, tell us some news of this vintage."

The guests looked at Roquemont with an air, signifying:

"Oh, indeed! You can tell us some news of this vintage."

The salad, with the little crusts of bread just

tipped with garlic, had made its appearance. Roquemont pronounced it exquisite.

They lounged about on their chairs. It was charming to dine with a deputy who did not talk about politics.

Then, too, Saint Blaise knew his ground, and three words in "patois," uttered at the right time, or perhaps a soothing anodyne speech to the curé, an allusion to the lessening of a tax already too heavy on the consumers, brought back for the deputy all the faith of his electors. Ah! the honest deputy, Saint Blaise! Decidedly it seemed impossible that the Count de Mercoeur had driven him away. Falsehoods! calumnies of the jealous! They then drank to the success of the harvest, to the health of the ladies, to the health of the deputy. The toasts thickened the tongues and heads of the guests. Toward the end of the dinner, the mayor, an old fixture, who had served all the governments, said all at once:

"I had not remarked your suspension lamp. What a fine piece of copper, and well hammered."

For the last seventeen years Monsieur the mayor had always admired the suspension lamps at the houses of the political men who had represented his department in the Chamber of Deputies. He

had the habit at the end of a grand dinner to talk of ornamental brass work, and adorable chiseling. On that day, the exclamation made Saint Blaise really jump :

"*Hein!* It is not bad ; I do not say it is, but you will see later on, when the nickel has been well introduced, how it will entirely supersede brass and bronze."

Almost all the guests said with one voice, " It is true."

" Yes, when the nickel "—at the end of a dinner people rarely finish their sentences. " The nickel." Saint Blaise was then reconciled to this metal. He began again on his hobby, the nickel ; its application to the industrial arts, the mines of the Caucasus, of New Caledonia, the mines of Montezucca—Montezucca !—the good of the country. Before all the advertisements, the bonds, the capitalizing !

And he went to find his photographs, and his " black hole " — " the roads carved out of the mountain."

They left the dining-room ; the ladies passed out into the salon; the gentlemen into the private room of Saint Blaise, which served as a smoking-room. The deputy talked all the time, rounding all his periods, backed up by Bressac, ringing on his mil-

lions, sounding grandly on his love of his country, of his Gascony. Yes! child of Gascony. Certainly it was a superb affair, and reserved for the region. Rothschild had tried it on, to get hold of it, but he, Saint Blaise, had seized it from Rothschild. With his elbows on the mantle-piece, picking up, by his old habit, his coat-tails, he declaimed, interrupting himself from time to time to relight his cigar, which was nearly extinguished. The chateau and the Count de Mercoeur were far from his thoughts. Wishing that this affair should be confined to the region, and not a party matter, we shall form a counsel of administration with the most honored and loved names of our country. The savings of Gascony in the affair will there be well invested.

While he was waiting to relight his cigar, Louis Goulone, who, since the commencement of the evening, thought only of the information which had been given him by a "well informed person," said timidly:

"Monsieur de Mercoeur, is he in this affair?"

A douche bath on the head of Saint Blaise, who fancied he saw the profile of Raoul drawn on the embrasure of the portico of the chateau, and that in his ears he heard the remark of, "Gentle-

man, noble by birth, but mercantile through his wife."

All his guests, who were anxious, seemed to ask him this:

"Yes; is the Count de Mercoeur in this?"

He remained embarrassed for some seconds, giving vague explanations, feeling that he was losing ground by his indecision, looking askance at Bressac. Bressac, after a silence, shut the door which communicated with the salon, saying with an easy natural air:

"I think our smoke annoys the ladies."

Then he said, "Sirs, the question of Monsieur Goulone has much troubled our dear deputy. There is a question of honor connected with it, which hinders Monsieur Saint Blaise to explain himself clearly."

He had glided by Saint Blaise and whispered:

"Let me do this, and I will save you."

These few words uttered by Bressac caused a great sensation.

A question of honor hanging on this. A duel, perhaps!

The deputy made a dignified gesture.

"Sirs," replied Bressac, "you will please excuse Monsieur Roquemont and me, for we have to at-

tend a rendezvous which we have given to the friends of Monsieur de Mercoeur."

Saint Blaise left the room with them, and accompanied them to the head of the stairs.

"Ah," said Saint Blaise. "You are fine, superb, you are ; you launch me into a duel."

"It is necessary, it is indispensable for your interests. But compose yourself ; I will carry this through."

" Will you also lead me to the combat ? "

" Much better, even, than if I fought the duel ! "

Saint Blaise, bewildered, re-entered his room, and he succeeded in giving his compatriots a high idea of his courage, in taking up again his theory of " nickel," and its use and applicability to the industrial arts.

XVIII.

By his abrupt decision to constitute himself a second to Saint Blaise, Bressac had joined the party, the last play he ever wished to play against Raoul. Meantime, he felt himself so sure of conquering that he did not feel any anger against his old friend or against the Countess of Mercoeur. He understood in what measure he had been foolish, at his age, in letting himself be touched with a fleeting love fancy.

Was it possible that such a player as he could permit a passion of any kind to take possession of his mind? And on the road to the chateau he muttered: "My only revenge, my only one, the one to be desired, is to take from them their million. Before eight days are over I shall have ruined them!"

Roquemont, in following Bressac, had submitted to the ascendency which the adventurer exercised over nearly all his comrades.

There had been between him and Bressac the same reason for intimacy as between Bressac and

Raoul, only Roquemont paid his commission duly by little and little, and without any shame, and placed himself among the *habitués* of the salon of the Baroness San Rinazzi.

Whenever Bressac and Gaetana talked of the duke, it was to say :

"What is the good of pressing him ? He serves us as well as a lighted chandelier."

Still the duke was uneasy in seeing himself led to the chateau by Bressac. After a long silence he said :

"Ah, hah ! Are we really going to Raoul's place ?"

Bressac replied with a grand, dignified manner :

"You wish to laugh ! Do I ever joke on such matters as these ?"

"No, no ; but this duel seems to me absurd."

"Absurd, idiotic ; I agree with you ; but as it has come about without our being able to help it, it is better for us to accustom ourselves to consider it necessary."

"Necessary to Saint Blaise, perhaps, but for you,—how ?"

"To me, to us, as much as to Saint Blaise."

"You think it is necessary that we should quarrel with Raoul ?"

"It is a thing already done, but all this will change positions. Let me only conduct the events. We absolutely want Raoul for this affair of Montezucca; he will make one of the party of us, *bon gré mal gré*, willingly or unwillingly."

"If you can manage him, Bressac."

How he trembled when Roquemont asked him:

"Are you certain that he will receive you? He has already sent you away to-day, perhaps more violently than Saint Blaise."

"I go in the name of my friend Saint Blaise. I go to demand an apology; he is bound to receive me."

"That is true; but I fear that the interview will not be a courteous one."

"Why not? Raoul is a gallant, polite gentleman! And apropos of this subject, you were with him when he gave way to his passion; did he say anything about us when we took our leave?"

"Nothing at all. He did the honors of his salon with the countess, to the great astonishment of his guests, who were ready to go off in a swoon. I think there is even a dinner taking place at the chateau to-night, and we shall be the disturbers of the fête."

"So much the better," said Bressac angrily.

Bressac was delighted with this idea. A little theatrical scene ; nothing is so good to lessen the courage of a man of undecided temperament.

Walking up the avenue, they distinguished through the large, open portals, that the salon was lighted up very much, decorated with flowers, and a numerous company was seated at the table.

Raoul had kept the greater number of his friends to dinner. Among them, Lestious, the Vidame, the cousins, and the Marquis and Marquise de Nuylaurens.

He thought that the moment for a final explanation with Jeanne had come. He wished to delay it, to delay the explanation until night, hoping that in the evening he would receive a word from Bressac, appointing a definite rendezvous to liquidate their affair.

Jeanne had several times approached Raoul, fixing her eyes straight on his, as if imploring of him a word ; but he always remained cold, sad, estranged. He knew his life was finished. Why mingle their feelings again ? Aunt Economy had alone spoken to Raoul about the incident of the afternoon.

" Very good, very good, Mercoeur. You treated that low set as they deserved. That Bressac—

Saint Blaise — then, that woman. Pah! Ah! Saint Blaise."

Raoul did not take in easily the notion that Saint Blaise was a rascal. No, only a weak man, led on; only a plaything in Bressac's hands as he himself had been. And he could not help laughing that the force of his anger had fallen most heavily on the deputy. It was now that he felt that he had his three hundred thousand francs—he was awake, alive again. He felt he wanted to crush this low set in whose clutches he had fallen, where even the highest nobility, alas! had also fallen. Saint Blaise was in their midst as well, so much the worse for him.

The commotion of the afternoon had gradually subsided; the dinner had been almost gay. Aunt de Lansac quite forgetting Saint Blaise and the Bressacs, revived the guests with her natural liveliness. She had just said to Jeanne:

"Go, my little one, to the piano; play us an old air; the music of the present day fatigues me."

Jeanne played leisurely a romance of Schubert. The Vidame declared it reminded him of his happiest days.

Suddenly Joseph came and spoke in a low voice to Raoul:

"Sir, Monsieur de Roquemont and Monsieur Bressac wish to speak to you."

"*Hein*, ha!"

"I told them that Monsieur could not receive them; but they come on the part of the deputy Saint Blaise."

Raoul laughed. Had they come to demand an apology? He went out, and found the seconds of the deputy in the vestibule. He said to Bressac:

"Unless you have come in the name of a man whom I have insulted to-day, I will not receive you."

Bressac looked at Raoul, and said with his malicious smile:

"This is perhaps the only reason why I have come, to conciliate honor and act as second to Saint Blaise."

Raoul never replied to him, but turning toward Roquemont, he said:

"What! are you here too?"

"My dear friend," answered Roquemont, "you will believe that I have come in a spirit of conciliation; that is why I am here. I have a real desire to arrange——"

Raoul brusquely interrupted him:

"Roquemont, arrange an affair in which they

seek an apology from a Count de Mercoeur? Do you know that these words on your part seem almost an insult?"

"My dear Raoul, I cannot tell what your temper is to-day. You really are intractable! impossible!"

"I have always had the same character, and I never permit any one to laugh at me about it. For the beginning and end of this, all explanations are unnecessary. I have only to introduce you to my seconds."

He called Joseph, and said to him:

"Beg Monsieur Lestious and the Vidame de Lontras to join me here."

When his two friends were there, he most seriously presented them, and retired, saying:

"I entirely recognize that Monsieur Saint Blaise has the right to be offended. You will accept, then, the conditions of these gentlemen. Joseph, give these gentlemen requisite writing material."

He returned to the salon, and with difficulty restrained his desire to laugh; he pitied heartily the deputy.

The last words of Raoul took away from his seconds the right of discussion; they accepted and reflected well the orders dictated by Bressac. The

conditions were simple and easy—a fencing sword, first blood, and usual glove at pleasure.

"There is in all this matter," said Bressac, "only a misunderstanding, an inadvertence; and we hope no misfortune——"

He had not time to finish the sentence, for Lestious and the Vidame, now that their mission was ended, bowed, and Joseph said:

"Come this way, gentlemen."

In going to Livone, Roquemont was moved by anger, and said:

"We were very ill received, my dear Bressac. We too could feel offended."

"All this will change to-morrow, after the duel," said Bressac. "I have forced Mercoeur to receive me to-day. I will force him to receive me again to-morrow."

Roquemont suddenly burst out laughing.

"What ails you?" said Bressac.

"I am thinking of that poor Saint Blaise; Saint Blaise, whom you have led on to a duel, much against his wishes. Poor devil!"

"Say rather, happy man! I benefit him with a duel, which will be without danger, and will be followed by a reconciliation, and it will give Saint Blaise the reputation of courage, to which he has

yet never aspired. His re-election will be certain, his capitalizing of the mines of Montezucca will rise in one day : and you pity Saint Blaise ? "

Their return to the private room of the deputy had the indication of a triumph. Since their departure there were nothing but whisperings, recitals of heroic deeds and adroit allusions, which were interrupted as soon as Madame Saint Blaise could hear them.

The Livonaise were charmed to feel that there was so much courage in the person of their representative. Saint Blaise had resigned himself to this duel in consoling himself with the idea that Raoul de Mercoeur could not have any particular feeling of hatred toward him.

It was simply an incident to be supported with dignity. Bressac, as soon as he entered the room, drew the deputy to a recess of the window.

" Well, now," said Saint Blaise.

" It is all arranged."

" Ah ! ah ! " As all eyes were turned toward him, he drew himself up, put his right hand into the breast of his coat, and with the other began to drum on a window.

" It is fixed for to-morrow," said Bressac.

" Where ? "

"In the field by the river-bank, behind the mill; there are large trees to shelter you and will permit one to be hidden, hidden from sight. We have chosen the sword, which for calm, quiet people is always the safest, less dangerous. You know how to use the sword?"

"Yes, as a matter of hygiene. I have taken lessons in fencing."

"That will do. On the ground you have only to keep yourself straight, without agitating yourself, without lunging the sword. Monsieur de Mercoeur has no wish to kill you, nor you him, I suppose!"

"Very well."

Then Saint Blaise returned to his guests, trilling, rather warbling, an air from "La Dame Blanche."

Toward midnight they retired.

The Livonaise who were still crossing the square could see the lights in the study of Saint Blaise.

"Our deputy is making his last deed and testament," affirmed the mayor.

Just then Raoul crossed the square, with Mademoiselle de Lansac on his arm. The Livonaise had a great feeling of emotion at the idea that only a few yards separated two men, who, on the morrow would cut one another's throats.

"Tell me," asked Aunt de Lansac, "all these goings, these comings, this evening while Jeanne was singing. It was about a duel, was it not?"

"Yes, aunt."

"And with whom? not Bressac, I imagine?"

"No, indeed; with Saint Blaise!"

"Poor man!"

"Ah! I shall not harm him. But if chance goes against me, you will charge yourself to terminate my affair with Bressac."

"That I promise to do."

"Good-by, my aunt. Sleep tranquilly; I have no bad presentiment. Jeanne heard nothing?"

"No, nothing; she said nothing to me."

"That's right, then."

When he returned to the chateau he found Jeanne still in the salon. The young wife waited for an explanation. She tried to provoke it.

"Monsieur de Mercoeur," said Jeanne, "I have been uneasy all the day; this scene, this insult, what does this all mean?"

Raoul had also thought that the clearing up of their false situation would take place on this night; but as he was going to fight on the morrow it was better to delay for a day the explanation.

He simply contented himself by answering his wife :

" We will talk of this to-morrow, Madame ; you must be very fatigued to-night ; it would be much better if you retire, it is too late for explanations."

He said this very naturally, and offered his hand to Jeanne to lead her to her own room. Then on the threshold of the door, she hesitated, remaining for some seconds nervous and impatient.

She thought he would say, " Do you forgive me ? " She would only have asked for one word, one movement, to cry out in her turn :

" Let us forget all that has separated us."

But no ; Raoul simply went and kissed his child on the forehead ; and he went out of the room, as he did every night, muttering :

" To-morrow, then ! "

Jeanne could not sleep. She had imagined that Raoul was going to fight, but would explain nothing to her, but only after he had fought for her.

Toward morning she heard a slight noise, the gravel crunching in the courtyard beneath her room. She looked. It was Raoul, leaving. Joseph followed him, carrying a long, thin package.

" Swords ! I am sure," thought she.

Just then her heart began to beat violently. It was for her sake that they were going to fight; he, Raoul, had said loudly enough when he called out:

"Those people there have the audacity to present themselves in *your* home, Madame! I am going to drive them away!"

"Like all women, she only thought of running to stop them, to say:

"No, no! I will not have you fight." It was but a thought; she collected herself, and on her knees, in the middle of the room, she prayed, hoping for news.

When Raoul arrived on the ground, a peasant advanced toward him:

"You are the Count de Mercoeur?"

"Yes, I am."

The peasant led him a little distance from Lestious and the Vidame, and gave him a letter. "From Monsieur Bressac."

Raoul glanced over the letter Bressac wrote, while sheltering under a tree. Bressac and Saint Blaise watched him.

"*If you seriously wound Saint Blaise, the 'Moniteur de Livone' will publish at the same time, as the legal procedure of the duel, that which you know of.*

It will be better for your own interests for you to be wounded. You can easily manage the swords. It must be finished thus. I shall come soon to the chateau."

The letter bore no signature. Bressac's handwriting even was disguised. The rascal did not care to leave any proof of his tricks.

Raoul only muttered :

" Ah ; the rogue ! the bandit ! Decidedly, Saint Blaise would render me a real favor if he did hurt me just a little."

All passed off correctly and well. It was a play duel, a modern time duel, caused by an incident, without passion or hatred.

The morning was charming ; a soft, southern wind played among the trees, and gently rippled over the River Baise.

The two adversaries faced each other, and for several seconds nothing was heard but the clashing of the steel and the noise of a little cascade falling down from the mill. The carriage and deportment of Saint Blaise was most correct. He had taken up a melodramatic pose, and did not stir. Raoul, disheartened, humiliated to see himself on the ground to give there the appearance only of a duel, held his weapon loosely.

Suddenly Bressac said :

" Stop, gentlemen."

Raoul had been scratched ; in making a pass with the sword on a line above the shoulder of his adversary, the sword of Saint Blaise had pierced his arm.

The deputy turned pale. Bressac and Roquemont had to support him. He groaned :

" No, no ; do not you see I shall never console myself with having caused such a misfortune."

The seconds exchanged glances of contempt. At once Roquemont, advancing to the other parties, said :

" Sirs, we place ourselves at your disposal ; can we be useful to you ? "

" I thank you, sirs," coolly answered Raoul.

Then Saint Blaise, thinking it would seem fine and generous on his part to be reconciled on the ground with his adversary, spontaneously offered his hand to Raoul.

" Believe me truly, Monsieur le Comte, I am distracted at——"

Raoul pitied the poor man, who was, like himself, the victim of a rogue, and he accepted his hand. The Vidame and Lestious had assisted the

doctor in bandaging Raoul's arm. When it was finished, the doctor said :

"It will be nothing, Monsieur le Comte ; you will only suffer from a little fever. Above all, do not go out."

They wished to go and procure a carriage. Raoul opposed this idea. He wished to make haste and return to the chateau, where they had no doubt remarked his absence. "Return to the chateau ! To find himself face to face with Jeanne ! Yesterday he had shown himself brave, courageous, to-day he felt anew that he was weak and timid—nervous."

This letter of Bressac's had sufficed to weaken all his energies. What new machinations had Bressac prepared ? What proposition had he to make to him. He was, however, determined not to draw back at all. The affair for him was cowardly as it was. He felt an absolute disgust of himself. This fault, the only one he had committed—ought this fault always to weigh on him through life ?

The peasants in going toward the market saluted him with :

"Good-morning, Monsieur de Mercoeur, and your company."

He imagined mentally that among all this crowd who bowed to him as the descendant of an old race, the representatives of several ages of bravery and loyalty, he thought that perhaps there was not one among them all who was not a better man than he.

XIX.

THIS news of a duel had revolutionized Livone since the morning. When Saint Blaise arrived at the entrance of the street which rises toward the bridge, he found the greater portion of the inhabitants at their doors, and two *gend'armes*, policemen, who were leisurely looking for their portfolios to put under their arms.

Raoul had taken the round turn built on the moat of the town. Sad and solemn, he got to the chateau on foot, leaning on the arms of the Vidame and Lestious. Saint Blaise felt he had the delight of having performed a duty at the risk of incurring a great danger, and his countenance bore the calm, serene look of a hero. At the corner of the square he encoutered Madame Saint Blaise, with a calico skirt, disordered hair, and camisole bodice, quite overcome :

"My poor husband, my poor husband !"

As the square was already filled with the stalls belonging to the market, with the country folks who frequent fairs, a little crowd formed round the

deputy. All hands were held out to him; the sergeants of police were the first to congratulate him; and now, even, it was Gagnet, the secretary of the mayor's office, who congratulated him before repairing to his office work, Souzac, who had given up for a time his newspaper, and the mayor, who had left two important visitors in his office.

"Ah! Our deputy; our deputy!"

Madame Saint Blaise pressed his arms, and repeated the only words which occurred to her in her excitement:

"My poor husband!"

He then entered his house, followed by his principal friends, feeling his increased popularity, with three more years of his seat on the bench. The mayor, Souzac, and Goulone uttered these enthusiastic sentences:

"Your grand conduct, Monsieur Deputy!"

"Your energy, Monsieur Deputy!"

"The manner in which you have revenged an insult."

Saint Blaise drew up, and showed a little gesture of humility.

"He had only done his duty, as any other Livonaise would have done in his place."

"No, no! Monsieur," said Goulone; "I know

of your behavior on the ground. I know of your courage. Ah ! I know. Besides, gentlemen, I have heard it all from a person 'well informed.' "

But little by little Saint Blaise woke up from his world of visions—sword thrusts, feints, and passage of arms—where his friends had elevated him, to come down to real life.

Bressac, gliding beside him, said in an undertone :

" It is just the time to urge on the nickel ! "

An audience already prepared ; the principal Livonaise assembled, the daughters of Monsieur the deputy, Gaetana, who had come down, powdered, got up, and set off in true Parisian style.

Saint Blaise perceived behind him the photographs of Montezucca, the black hole. " It is there ! " He had placed his finger on the black hole, and gone off to Spain, the nickel, its use and its application to the industrial arts, the interest of this region of the country.

Roquemont whispered in Bressac's ear :

" You were right, this affair has done him service. Long live the nickel ! It now only requires the committee of administration."

"That will be done to-night."

"You, then, firmly believe in this poor Raoul? Come! did you not see him this morning?"

"Raoul did not attempt to defend himself, and allowed himself to be wounded on the sword of Saint Blaise. Ah! well now, I shall have his signature with the same ease."

Aunt de Lansac had prevented Jeanne from leaving the chateau. Both of them waited in the grand salon, frightfully anxious.

"You love him, Raoul—then, little one?"

"Yes, and my aunt; I have only him, you, and my child."

It was a little finished coquetry on the part of Aunt de Lansac to make her unceasingly repeat the three names of those beings who loved the young wife. The profile of Raoul had at last appeared on the threshold of the door. He had suddenly left his friends to run off, and these gentlemen discreetly waited.

"Raoul! My Raoul!"

"My Jeanne! My Jeanne!"

"You are wounded?"

"Ah! It is nothing, only a simple scratch."

Face to face, forgetting the world and all else, they found again one of those delightful moments

of happiness which seemed to have fled from them forever.

"Oh, well! Nobody embraces me!"

It was Aunt de Lansac who said this, with her usual off-hand manner.

"You wicked, ungrateful things!"

"Aunt, dear aunt, do forgive us."

"Ungrateful creatures, not even a caress for the old aunt," she said, with a little tone of anger, in agitation, because the tears were in her eyes, and she did not wish them to be seen.

And then, when Raoul had left them, to say a word and kiss his child, Jeanne, leaning forward to the dowager, said:

"Ah! I am so happy, my aunt. I have just found again my own Raoul!"

The happiness of this young lady, which appeared in her movements, in her glistening eyes, recalled to Mademoiselle de Lansac the terrible cause of the rupture which existed between Raoul and Jeanne. With the good sense of age, she wished to profit by this emotion, by this reconcilement, so natural too, which seemed made to blot out all the past.

"See, my children, I will leave you; I leave you to enjoy a tête-à-tête like two lovers." Then turn-

ing to Raoul, speaking low, she asked: "Is it all finished with this Bressac?"

"No, but I expect him to-day."

"Here?"

"It must be so."

"When does he come?"

"Very soon."

"Do you wish that I should stop with Jeanne or take her with me?"

"No, my aunt, I prefer being alone here with her."

"I shall return to lunch. Good-by till then, my children."

As she went out she met Lestious and the Vidame, who at length decided to enter the chateau. They exchanged hand-shakes with Raoul and his wife. Jeanne thanked them warmly, and soon the two lovers, as they were called by Mademoiselle de Lansac, were alone.

They had scarcely the time to gain their rooms, when Joseph came to announce the Combat, Lansac, and Marquis de Nuylaurens, who wished to see the wounded man.

"I shall receive no one, Joseph," said Raoul. "You understand me well; I shall see no one except Monsieur Bressac. Thank these gentlemen."

As soon as Joseph had retired, Jeanne whispered :

"Bressac !"

Then there was a dead silence. The first burst of tenderness over, Jeanne hoped that their old happy life would recommence, and she was woke up with the name of this rogue between them.

"Bressac ! You are again going to receive Bressac ?"

"Yes, Jeanne, for the last time. When I have seen him I will tell you why I have trembled before that man. I will tell you of the infamous act I committed, for I have had enough of wrestling and lying. To lie to you, Jeanne, to you, whom I am not worthy to love."

"Be quiet, Raoul, be silent now. You frighten me. What more ? As you have just fought about me, and I have you here, wounded."

"Wounded ! Wounded !" And Raoul continued with an agonized expression : "Jeanne, I am expecting this wretch. I can blot out to-day the fault I have committed before. When this is all finished you will know about my conduct. You only have the right to judge me ; before you, only, will I accuse myself ; but I have not the right to deceive you any longer."

Jeanne replied leisurely :

"Raoul, why do you talk so? Why exaggerate a fault, which your sufferings, your noble conduct, have long ago wiped out? Listen to me! You have no mother now; I have the right to love you as your mother would have done, to be indulgent as she would have been. I have the right to pardon you, since you wish to accuse yourself."

"Forgive me, Jeanne, you cannot when you know."

Some one rapped at the door; it was Joseph, who came to warn Raoul that Bressac waited in the salon.

Jeanne said again: "Give me your hand, Raoul de Mercoeur, and whatever you say or do, remember that thy Jeanne approves of it. Come back to me soon, Raoul."

She threw herself on her knees, as she had done in the morning, understanding all that would pass, something as terrible as the duel by the riverside.

Bressac, buttoned up in his frock coat, looking pale, was standing watching the door by which Raoul was to enter.

"Joseph," said Raoul, "place yourself before the door, and let no one enter but you, you only."

Then he pointed to a chair to Bressac on the

other side of the table in the middle of the room, and sat down himself.

"Let me see, what do you want?" said Raoul.

"My dear friend," said Bressac, "you wish to surround your door, we can talk at our ease. Permit me to tell you that you seem to have forgotten to lead up to the affair which brings me here. It is now more than two years ago since you were ruined, crushed."

"Pardon me," said Raoul, "it is useless to enter into all those details; you have already told me all that night you invited yourself to my table."

"A little against your wish."

"Absolutely against my wish. All these preambles are useless. The situation is simple. To you, or to Gaetana, that matters little, I gave a letter which is worth three hundred thousand francs. These three hundred thousand francs are here, payable on the bank, with the signature of the Banker Lestious. Give me that letter."

Bressac replied quietly: "You run, you go fast, you speak, you insult people, you cause duels. Be a little more calm, dear friend. It is necessary also on account of your wound. The situation of this affair which we have undertaken is more com-

plicated than you know of. Do you wish or not that I explain it to you?"

Raoul decided to finish all this. Already he was wearied, disheartened, at his weakness.

"I listen to you, go on quickly."

Bressac put his two elbows on the table, and gesticulating with his two arms, began what he called the explanation of the affair with as much calmness and clearness as Saint Blaise when he talked of his mines of nickel.

"I take up the matter at the point where we left off. You have signed a letter which you gave up to me, which gave me the right of command to say to you, 'I will.' And this letter I have on me. Do not try to take it from me. I have also a revolver in my pocket. Besides, you are wounded, your arm pains you. It is fortunate that I can approach you without seeing you foaming with rage, and calling out to your servants, 'Drive away those people there!' These people there—the Baroness San Rinazzi and the sympathetic Bressac! You play the scornful well; but to-day, when we saw that you could not pay those three hundred thousand francs by yourself, we sought a means of touching them without you, but through you. This is what I thought to

propose to you yesterday when I came with Saint Blaise."

Raoul made an angry gesture; but Bressac continued quietly, without disturbing himself:

"Patience, Raoul. Now, we have got to the facts. Do you know or not about the nickel?"

"Yes, Montezucca, the yellow placard. Leave that, go on."

"These mines in the hands of the deputy Saint Blaise, who wishes to launch them, and publish the prospectus in the south, require him to have a committee of administration to dazzle these southerners. Roquemont and Marsies have already joined the party, it now only wants the Count de Mercoeur. Promise, by writing this, to join the committee of administration, and I will return you your letter. This is what I came to tell you yesterday, and to-day I can make you the same proposals, but am obliged to add some new conditions."

"And these conditions?"

"These conditions are, that Saint Blaise, by a perfect act of politeness, comes to inquire about your health, that you will receive him, and that next Sunday the Baroness Gaetana de San Rinazzi will come to return the visit that the Countess Mercoeur will have made her during the week."

"If I do not accept these conditions or these financial proposals?"

"The town of Livone, then the department of Saint Blaise, the south, and soon Paris, will learn in what manner Mademoiselle Jeanne Berthout became Countess of Mercoeur."

"Do you know this is blackmail?"

"Do you think that this talk is a foolish boast, Raoul? Why these fine words? Why reproach others for what you yourself have done?"

"Blackmail is a base act, is it not?"

"To sell your name is rather more base, more hypocritical, more low and vile. We value ourselves. Besides, I cannot understand your scruples. You will gain, by what I propose, three hundred thousand francs."

"And you, how much do you gain?"

"I am frank with you, I gain a million. I play my cards openly on the table."

"Cards marked or not. *Hein?*"

Bressac trembled for a moment, then he replied, with a certain boldness:

"What do you mean to say?"

"I do now know your life as well as my own to-day."

"It may be so, but you have no proofs; I have some."

However, the calm of Raoul frightened Bressac.

"For the last time, do you accept, yes or no, the terms I propose."

"No, no!" said Raoul shortly. "Monsieur Saint Blaise will remain at his house, the Baroness San Rinazzi will leave Livone as soon as possible; it is what she had better do. About those mines, an affair in which you are mixed up—you, a rascal, directed by Saint Blaise, a political shuttlecock who works them up when he wants an unknown sum of money, prepared by Van Dernicht, a sharper who tried to ruin me: this can only be a financial fraud. And I prefer killing myself to joining that party."

"Well, remember that your refusal causes me to lose a million. Will you make that sum good to me?"

"Perhaps! Wait now, here."

Raoul got up with difficulty, caused by his wound, which was beginning to make him feel heavy. He rang for Joseph, leaned on him, left the salon, and mounted the stairs. Jeanne was on her knees, praying, when her husband entered there.

"Ah! Now, Raoul," muttered she.

Raoul took Jeanne's hand and raised her.

"Madame de Mercoeur," said he, "you know that I have committed an infamous action; that I dishonor you as well as myself, and also our son. You only, as well as my Aunt de Lansac, to whom I have owned all, only know of this. To-day the wretch, who has broken up our happiness, is ready to render the matter public. He holds in his hands the proofs of my dishonor, to take them from him I require three hundred thousand francs."

Jeanne interrupted him :

"Monsieur, my fortune is yours ; you have the right to dispose of it."

"Alas ! alas ! Madame, this is only the half of what I have to tell you. To collect these three hundred thousand francs without owning my fault to you, I asked my Aunt de Lansac to lend them. My aunt had only two hundred thousand francs, the Banker Lestious has loaned me the rest. I hoped, then, in exchange for this sum, to get back my letter, a letter written by me."

"And you have not been able to get it ?"

"No. What they exact of me is no longer money. Our three hundred thousand francs they do not care for. In exchange for my letter they demand of me that I shall lend my name to a sort of fraudulent scheme, these mines of Montezucca,

which you heard spoken of in these last few days."

"And you have refused, Raoul?"

"Yes, Jeanne."

She threw herself suddenly on his neck:

"My Raoul, so good! So honest! Yes, you are indeed all that I have ever believed you to be. And they have come to propose to you to efface all, at the price of a new infamy which engages you to nothing, and from which you can free yourself in a few days. Ah, how happy I am now! How much I thank you for refusing them."

"I have refused, Jeanne, because I love you."

Jeanne drew herself a little away from him, and putting her hands on his shoulders, said, looking him well in the face:

"No, Raoul, you refused because you are a regenerated man; you refused because you are an honest man."

Then she stopped, and sobbed out directly:

"But, this man is still there. He wants money, does he not? Since these three hundred thousand do not content him, he wants double that sum, perhaps."

"Madame, they demand a million. Your whole fortune, the fortune of your child."

Jeanne simply said : " If my child were a man, he would advise me to give it all to you." She then ran to her safe, and taking out a roll of securities, she exclaimed : " Here now, Raoul, take them all. They are as much yours as mine. Blot out all this."

" Thank you, Jeanne ; thank you ! "

He took the bundle which Jeanne tendered him, and descended into the salon.

Bressac was seized with great trembling and shaking when he saw Joseph enter the room with his master. The servant never ceased to look at him, in waiting, as if he expected an order.

" You have asked of me a million ! " said Raoul. " I could pay it to you, as the Countess of Mercoeur has just authorized me ; but as for me, I refuse ! "

Bressac gave a little nervous laugh.

" Ah, then, you refuse. You prefer the scandal ? "

" Listen to me," said Raoul. " I owed you three hundred thousand francs for about a year. When a nobleman repays what he owes to sharpers of your kind, he joins on the interest to the last two ; this is what I am going to do. You return me my letter, I will give you the six hundred thousand

francs, and we shall be quits. You will not draw from me a cent more."

Bressac heaved a long sigh, he devoured with his eyes the bundle of deeds. It was a fortune, this fortune so ardently desired. He blurted out :

"I accept."

Then, with very great deliberation, he opened his frock coat to take out his portfolio. At this moment the butt end of his revolver appeared. Quickly, Joseph threw himself on the wretched creature and took his revolver from him. Raoul quietly said :

"Such toys are always dangerous in the hands of rogues of your stamp."

Bressac burst out in anger, crying :

"You wish, then, to assassinate me ?"

Raoul could not help laughing at the cowardice of the rascal.

"No, no ! But for a long time you have been master; now it is my turn. Only, as I am wounded, and you are not, the terms are not equal. Give me my letter."

"Who assures me that in paying me you are not going to cheat me ?"

Raoul snatched the letter.

"Miserable wretch !" said Raoul. He took the

letter, read it, folded it up and put it into his right hand, then with his left hand he pushed the deeds into the middle of the table.

"Count them over now; here are first the three hundred thousand francs, then bonds of the Suez Canal, and the balance in Government bonds."

While Raoul was preparing the money, choosing those which were of value to the bearer, Joseph had shut all the doors. Bressac was calculating; he had all the quotations and fluctuations of the Exchange in his head.

"This now is right and well; now we are quits."

He got up to leave, and extended his hands toward the bonds:

"Pardon," said Raoul, in placing his left hand on the papers; "and you, who have stolen from me three hundred thousand francs. It is robbery, which justice can overtake and punish, but for which I am going to punish you. You are alone, unarmed; at one word of mine, Joseph will blow out your brains!"

"Then this servant remains here?"

"This servant is my foster brother; he fought beside me in the war of 1870; he is of my family."

Joseph exclaimed in *patois:*

"Ah! rogue, bandit that you are, go along with you!"

Bressac searcely breathed from fright.

"My God! I do not want to kill you," replied Raoul, "but for several months you have acted toward me like a bandit, a thief. If I had not learned that you stole at play, now that I have paid, I should have provoked, and fought you; but as you are a thief and a coward, I will not soil myself to kill you. I wish only to shake you off. You have played Mephisto with me. Now, it is my turn. You have there a pen and some paper. Write! To-day I am certain that you are guilty of what you are accused. Write the following, and at my dictation, and don't disguise your handwriting:

"'*I acknowledge that I am guilty of a robbery of eight thousand francs, committed twelve years ago, from Monsieur Lousseteau, Notary at Livone.*'

"Good; now go on to other things:

"'*I acknowledge that I have used marked cards, the day on which I gained eight hundred francs at écarté, from the General Moustil, at the Count de Mercoeur's house.*'"

"I swear to you on that day,——" said Bressac.

"It matters little whether it was that day or any other day :

"'*Thus it was in all the salons where I have played.*'

"Good ! Now, I will do as I please with these lines ; they are at my disposal. Pass on to your worthy associate. What and who is that Baronne San Rinazzi ?"

"The wife of the Baron de ——"

"Do not lie. She is a female sharper, an adventuress. Speak, now !"

"I swear to you that she is really the widow of the baron ; it is only since his death that she has so fallen."

"Where did you know her ?"

"At Paris."

"Before she came to Paris, where was she ?"

"In Italy."

"What did she do there ?"

"She had a gaming house."

"Where ?"

"Near Naples."

"Write that."

"'*I affirm that the woman who bears the name of Baroness San Rinazzi had a gambling house near Naples.*'"

"What year?"

"In 1872, in a little village."

"Which?"

"San Remo, near Naples."

"Sign this now, and date it also, Chateau de Mercoeur, 29th July, 1882. Add this postscript:

"'*It is for this reason that the Count de Mercoeur drove me away from his chateau yesterday, Sunday.*'

"Give me this writing."

Raoul read again attentively what Bressac had written; then he went on:

"We have the air of playing a drama. So much the worse. It is your kind of scoundrels who furnish the material for trials at the Court of Assizes. I wish to shield myself from your falsehood and babbling. You will return to Livone. This evening at three o'clock you will take the train for Spain. You will be to-morrow at Madrid. From there you can get to any country that suits you. I forbid you ever to return to France."

Bressac tried to reply in his usual bragging boulevard manner:

"On my word, Monsieur! you are magnificent! It is not a drama we are playing, but a vulgar melodrama. And if I refuse to obey?"

"If you refuse, the paper which you have just signed shall be taken by me to the President of the Republic, our great law authority in France. Meanwhile, get away, get out of here!"

Bressac had fastened up his bonds, and slowly he left the salon, where Raoul, standing up, was menacing him, his wounded arm extended. He felt cowed, and when he got to the avenue, he murmured:

"He is an honest man. He is in the right!"

XX.

AFTER the departure of Bressac, Raoul fell back in his arm-chair, saying to himself :

" It is true, I have been playing a vulgar melodrama, but I have suffered so much, that I wish from henceforth that my life should be quiet and tranquil, and that nobody belonging to me should be at the mercy of these wretches. It seems to make a better man of me now that my wife is not a millionairess. Now, have I the strength of mind to repair the past ? "

He thought over the terrible year which he had just passed through. He saw again mentally his bachelor apartments, that Sunday in June where he had awoke, muttering the word which had made him commit a crime :

" Ruined ! ruined ! "

He had just ruined his wife and child. Out of this fortune which yesterday reached nearly a million, there only remained two or three hundred thousand francs. To buy up the secret of his fault, he had lost seven hundred thousand francs.

Better would it have been to have shot himself than to marry. To shoot himself! He had no right to do that now, and at present he did not think of it. He was liberated.

"This money which Bressac stole from me, I myself have stolen from my child, from my wife. I owe it to them. My duty is to regain that money."

While thus meditating, he felt a warm breath on his cheek and forehead, and a hand stole into his.

"Raoul!"

"Jeanne!"

"Now nothing can separate us from henceforth."

"Alas! Jeanne, we must separate and perhaps forever."

"We are to separate?"

"Yes; when we have repaid Aunt de Lansac the two hundred thousand francs which she has advanced, and the one hundred thousand francs which my friend Lestious loaned me yesterday, out of your fortune, of which there were still nine hundred thousand, there will only remain two hundred thousand francs and this chateau. I lost a hundred thousand francs in Paris. I have just lost six hundred thousand more. It is I who have ruined you and our child!"

"And what does that signify if we have done our duty?"

He muttered sadly, in lowering his head:

"After the situation in which you left your father's house, it is almost poverty."

"And does poverty frighten you, then, Raoul?"

"For myself, no; for you and our child it does."

"When one is poor, one works."

"Yes, yes; I shall work, but certainly not you. You will remain here; you can live here very handsomely, in quietly waiting for my work to give me the means of increasing our revenues."

"What work? What are you going to do, Raoul?"

"Leave here. Go away, perhaps to Paris; perhaps farther; devote myself entirely to my work, whatever it may be; what I may choose; follow fortune and regain all I have lost which did not belong to me!"

"You wish to leave—alone?"

"In your goodness, Jeanne, you have saved my honor. You have saved my name; that name which my parents left me as a sacred deposit, a trust; and which I have sullied. But I shall never forget that I have seriously offended you;

that all our love, all our mutual existence, is over—finished between us."

"Raoul, do not remember all these things; you wish to leave—so let it be. We will go together."

"Jeanne, that is impossible."

"You will work, Raoul; we will work together. You do not know—you do not—this life of struggles, of horrible work. And now we will choose a business, a business where two, side by side, can build up again the fortune of our child. You will have more courage when I am near you. I have reconquered you, Raoul; now I will never leave you. Our Aunt de Lansac will live here at the chateau. We will leave our child with her, during the time when our life will be taken up with our business, and we will come and spend here our holidays. You thought, then, that I would let you leave alone? But you do not understand that I love you more than ever, that you are my life."

"Jeanne, Jeanne, you are allowing yourself to dream. You said to me that I was an honest man."

"That is true."

"Ah, well; an honest man should never lie. This life beside me, these struggles which you

would share, would all be a falsehood ; for I am unworthy of your love, of your devotion ! "

" Be silent, be silent, Raoul ! "

" No, no ; you ought to know what has been my life ; you ought to know the fault that I have committed."

" Why, since there is no proof."

" It does exist. It is there, in that envelope. It is a letter written by me. I will leave it to you ; when I am gone you can read it. And after having read it, you will acknowledge that I was right ; that you could never pardon me."

" Very good, Raoul ; give me then that letter."

" Here it is. Do not read it before me, or you will take away all my courage."

A terrible struggle took place in the mind of Jeanne. She would not wish, she never wished, previously, to know the secret. Was she to know it now? A dull silence followed this last crowning explanation. Some one rapped at the door of the salon. It was Mademoiselle de Lansac who arrived, her happy laugh on her lips.

" Well, now, what do I see ? Raoul up, Raoul here, after a duel ? When your doors are shut ; when you refuse to allow your friends to come and

see the wounded one. What is passing between you two, Jeanne?"

The young wife went toward her, and cried out:

"My aunt, Raoul and you are my only family. Our reunion, then, makes a family council. Raoul will explain. We are nearly ruined. It required nearly all our fortune to repurchase a letter about which Raoul has told you."

Aunt Economy became livid.

"That letter, my aunt—I do not even know its contents. Here it is. Raoul wishes to leave, leave here without me, to work and regain our fortune, and he says I must only read this letter when he has left us. In my place, aunt, what would you do?"

"What should I do—what should I do, eh? I have no reason to tell you, because you are a Mercoeur, little one. Perhaps you are going to do——"

Already Jeanne had set fire to the envelope which Raoul had given her, and with an admirable calm and serenity she turned toward her husband:

"You see, now, Raoul, that nothing can separate us."

Raoul threw himself on his knees before his wife, and kissed her hands, sobbing quietly. They

were tears of joy, of tenderness. The bad days had passed away.

Seated in her arm-chair, sobbing like these two, the Dowager de Lansac repeated the phrase :

"Ah! that little one, that little one! She is really a Countess of Mercoeur!"

THE END.

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